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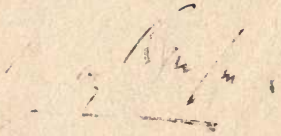

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STEWART & KIDD COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,
CINCINNATI, U. S. A.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE THEATER

BY ONE OF THE BEST KNOWN
THEATRICAL MEN IN NEW YORK

CINCINNATI
STEWART & KIDD COMPANY
1916

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FOREWORD

The author of this book is one of the best known theatrical men in New York. For ten years he has enjoyed the confidence of his business associates and the respect of the thousands of men and women of the stage who have been in the employ of his firm. His word with all of these is as good as his bond. What he says here he has said deliberately, after long reflection, and with the sole idea of telling the truth that the truth may help those who need to know it most. Young men and women ambitious to go on the stage, to write plays or to associate themselves in some other manner or capacity with the theater will find in what he has written the plain facts as he knows them — without adornment, exaggeration or excuse.

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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE THEATER

CHAPTER I

FACING FACTS

I AM the general manager of one of the best-known firms of theatrical producers in the country. Ten years ago I left my home in a city of the Middle West to enter the theatrical business. I did what many a young man before and since has done — I stepped from the newspaper to the theatrical field. I was young and ambitious and, by degrees, from one position to another, I fought my way upward. I began at seventy-five dollars a week; today I receive four hundred a week and I earn three times what I am paid. Ten years ago I was the dramatic editor of a quiet, dignified, influential daily newspaper of my home city. It was a comfortable, secure berth, paying me fifty dollars a week and promising, when my days of usefulness were at an end, a fair pension provision for my old age.

Perhaps I should have been satisfied. What

planted the seed of discontent I do not know. I awoke one morning to find myself longing for broader opportunities and common sense immediately counselled that there was only one other line of work for which I was adapted that would afford the broader opportunities I wanted. It was the theatrical business. I had come in contact with it and with men employed in it and I knew it about as well as a close observer could know any business in a general way without actually engaging in it.

So, without more ado, into the theatrical business I went. A manager of more than national prominence was in need of a press agent — I think he called it general director of publicity — and with the exchange of some half-dozen telegrams, his choice finally settled on me. I resigned my position with the newspaper; I closed my desk for the last time; I bade old friends and surroundings good-by, and I departed.

I arrived in New York and began my work with high aspirations. I knew the stage, or, to be exact, I thought I knew the stage, and the theater to me was an institution of art. I had read Lamb and Lewes and Arnold and others that I no longer recall, and I had been inspired by them with respect and reverence for its purpose and its achievement. I believed in the theater with all my heart and soul; I loved it. And I entered upon my new

field of work with something more and worthier than mere increase of salary as the propelling motive. I would serve the theater; I would devote my life, thenceforth, to its cause. My labor would be for its art and it would be a labor of love.

All this seems odd to me now, but there is no exaggeration in the statement. On the contrary, I am scarcely doing full justice to the faith and feelings I entertained at the time. With ten years of experience back of me, it is difficult to recall all the ardor and enthusiasm of that novitiate period. But I do recollect — and memory paints the picture vividly — the sober-faced young man who went at his first day's work with the high resolve to be worthy of the service to which he had dedicated himself.

Today, with this decade behind me —" long ago and far away," indeed — I reflect upon those ideas and ideals of yesterday and smile at them. I am forty years old and, perhaps, the illusions have departed only naturally with the advance of the years. I am afraid, though, that they vanished too early in my experience for this to account for their disappearance.

They were gone, as a matter of fact, before I had been half a year in New York. At the end of that period, I had come to a readjustment of ideas — my ideals I had put away. My idol was shattered; the respect and reverence I had felt for

the theater were dead. The sentiment went out of my heart and I bit my teeth together on the hard fact that I was engaged in a crushing, grinding, soulless business that made obeisance to money and not to art. Thereafter I took things as I found them; I entertained no more illusions; I cherished no more sentiments. I went into the game with my jaws set, to play it by the rules as they were, and, win or lose, to play it to the bitter end.

In a few more weeks my name will be erased from the door of the office that has been mine for five years. With the beginning of a new season, another name will replace mine above the title "General Manager." I do not know who my successor will be, but, here and now, I wish him God-speed. My employers will soon be in receipt of my resignation and, unless, perchance, their eyes fall on this and they recognize the writer, the resignation itself will be the first intimation of my intention to withdraw from the executive direction of their affairs.

I am finished, and I return whence I came. Not, to be sure, to the critic's desk of ten years ago, but back to my old home city, back to its joy of old friends and to the delight of its happier, more genuine life and living. I retire with a modest capital — not much, but enough at least to insure independence. A few months ago, my employers lost on three unsuccessful theatrical ven-

tures in less than sixty days a sum as large as the total amount of my small savings, and it would be a poor season, indeed, when any two of their merely average successes failed to return in profits alone an amount much greater than the value of all I possess. But I am satisfied.

And a part of the immediate satisfaction I feel comes from finding myself in a position at last to tell the truth about the theater and the theatrical business. The public, to put the fact squarely, has not had the truth, or, at most, it has had only a little truth, possibly a background of truth, but never the plain truth. What it gets is cold-creamed, painted and powdered like an actress's face in make-up. It is fiction. Perhaps I ought to let it go at this and say no more, accepting it as something the public likes and demands — else there would be less of it published — and something it reads eagerly and apparently without harm. But the harm is there and I have been so placed that I could see it and estimate it and I know it for what it is and what it does. It is serious — more serious than the public suspects — and I make only a conservative statement when I say that it has brought ruin to hundreds and misery to thousands.

I do not allude, of course, to the journalistic criticism of current plays in which the productions are viewed entirely upon the basis of their intrinsic

merit. I refer to the superficial, gilding comment written about and around the stage and its stars, the senseless, truthless, panegyric sort that conveys wrong impressions of theatrical life, gives only its sunny side, stimulates the futile ambitions of stage-struck Mary Jones, draws Herbert Smith away from his job at the haberdashery counter to join the ranks of chorus men, and leads the Browns of both sexes to waste their time trying to write plays.

The other day, I sat with one of the most prominent critics in New York City, a man whose judgment is excellent and whose veracity and honesty have never been and never will be doubted. I asked him if he did not think some one ought to tell the truth about the theater.

"Yes," he said. "Every day for fifteen years I have encountered reason after reason why the truth should be told."

"Why not do it?" I demanded.

And very frankly he replied: "I don't dare."

Only a few days after I had decided to retire from the business, a friend put the same question to me.

"Why don't you tell the truth about the theater?" he asked.

"Some day," I replied, "perhaps I shall."

And today I do not wonder if I dare; I only wonder if I can.

CHAPTER II

PEGGY APPEARS

I HAVE said that I am forty. Those who know me probably think I am fifty. Ten years ago my hair was black; today it is white. Ten years ago I stood straight and held my shoulders square. Today I stoop and I am not particular whether my shoulders are squared or rounded. Ten years ago my friends said I had nerve. Today I have nerves. Ten years ago the same friends said I showed promise of a good future as a writer; today all the writing I do is to sign my name and whatever I have to set down on paper is dictated to a stenographer. All the "knack" of writing has gone from me. It is not easy, in other words, considering mental and physical state and habit, to undertake what men better qualified than I for the work have declined to do. But there are times when I think a good deal about the Joneses and Smiths and Browns, and then I am inclined to go on with the task regardless of everything.

The whole thing was brought home to me about the time I made up my mind to spend another season in the business and then retire. It was late one afternoon and I was sitting in my office

talking to a gentleman whose guest I was to be that evening at dinner. A note was placed on my desk and I tore open the envelop to recognize at a glance the signature of my old friend, Ned Scott. Back where I came from, Ned and I had grown up together, and a letter from him meant something more than routine.

This will be presented to you, [it ran], by Dick Hall's daughter, Margaret. We call her Peggy. Dick died a year ago and Peggy and her mother are compelled to support themselves. They have looked to me for advice and I have done whatever I could to help them. But Peggy has lately concluded that she ought to go on the stage and that is a matter concerning which I can't, of course, advise her at all. People who ought to know tell me she has talent, and I shouldn't be surprised if she has. Dick had, you'll remember. Anyway, Peggy can play the piano a little, recite a bit and sing a bit, all as well as Dick himself could, and she is ambitious and eager to try. She has come to New York for that purpose and I am sending her direct to you. If she doesn't succeed, there will always be a place in my office here for her and she will be welcome to return. I hope you'll do what you can to help her.

With best regards, I am,

Yours as ever,

SCOTTY."

I read the letter in silence. Poor old Dick! He too could "play the piano a little and sing a

bit." That was his trouble. He was too much the "goodfellow," too willing all his life to "oblige" with his little scattered talents. In business hours, Dick's mind was on the snare drum; and when he was playing the snare drum his mind was on something else. So it went; he couldn't concentrate. And now was come his daughter who could "play the piano a little and sing a bit," and Fate and Scott had combined somehow to direct her to me.

I pushed the button and told the office boy to show her in. She came through the door timidly, a girl of nineteen or twenty. There was something about her that was pathetically appealing — she seemed so dependent, so lonely, so bewildered. For half an hour I talked to her as I have never talked to anyone before or since. I told her what she faced, what lay beyond the stage door, what she must be prepared to endure. I begged her to go back home.

She heard me in silence, tinged with that suggestion of twenty's ill-concealed contempt for forty's fears, that youth shows — and tries not to. She shook her head.

"I'll stay and try," she said.

"Look here," I replied, "I knew your father. He and I were boys together. If neither reason nor fact will move you, just go back because your father's old friend begs you to. Mr. Scott tells

me there's a place for you in his office. Take it, and a few years from now, you'll be mighty glad you did."

It was useless. Peggy Hall would have none of my counsel. A week later, she was "singing a bit" at the rehearsals of a musical comedy and telling me, proudly, her face aglow with her pride, that she had won the place for herself and succeeded without assistance from me. But Peggy was wrong. As she stood on the stage at the Circle with a hundred other applicants, chance brought me to the theater. Lips apart, eyes big and round and cheeks flushed with excitement and hope, I saw her standing in the line and, unobserved, I spoke to the stage director. Thus she came to a place in the chorus, but I did not tell Peggy so.

This was, as I say, a year ago. Of Peggy I shall have occasion to speak later. Just now I must go back to the gentleman waiting patiently in my office while I delivered my lecture to Dick Hall's daughter. He was a silent auditor of what I said, and when she was gone, he turned to me.

"See here," he asked, "were you telling the truth to that girl?"

"No," I replied, "not half of it, not a quarter of it. I couldn't. She'd never grasp it. Why, I'd never be able to put it in words that she'd even understand."

"Then," he said, "somebody — surely somebody ought to tell the truth about the theater."

"Meaning me?" I asked.

"Why not?" he rejoined.

And why not, indeed? Still, I'm reminded of the old story of the lobster. One man, you remember, swore it was green; another swore it was red. Both were right, but neither believed the other and neither was more than half right. What seems to be true to one man may seem to be false to another. It depends on when and how one sees the lobster — green on the cook's table with seaweed clutched in its claw or red on the waiter's tray with a parsley sprig to trim it. For ten years I have lived in the life of the theater and, I might say, I know it red and I know it green, and I know it is both.

CHAPTER III

BROADWAY AS IT IS

THE producer with whom I began my career in the theatrical business was then and still is one of the foremost managers in the country. I shall call him Bingo — near enough to his real name to suggest it and, if names have any descriptive significance at all, certainly characteristic of the man himself. Bingo was known to be changeable in opinion and plan, abrupt and rough in manner and language and not by any means as temperate as his own good demanded. By sheer force of industry, assisted now and then by surprisingly good judgment which was generally called " Bingo luck," my employer had risen to an enviable position in the theatrical world. Behind him, extending back to his orphaned boyhood days, lay a picturesque trail of obstacles overcome, opposition conquered and success retrieved from failure. Defeat was something that Bingo's dauntless spirit never recognized and, in his eventful career he had made and lost a dozen fortunes and, though he is now on the shady side of fifty, I

should not be surprised if he lost and made another fortune or two before he retires.

I no sooner entered Bingo's office and reported ready for work than I sat down to a desk piled high with matters demanding immediate attention and from that day to this, I have never seen the bottom of the pile nor the top of my desk. Since then I have changed from one employer to another half a dozen times, always for the better and always with the idea that a position a little higher up could be had if I went after it hard enough. Now for five years I have been at the top, with nothing higher in sight. With each change, the work increased, the pile on the desk grew taller and the top of the desk became more remote. The salary steadily advanced, of course, but, as I look back over the period, I still suspect that I have paid too much — and far too much — for my whistle.

I don't believe I could have entered the theatrical business, despite the adverse conditions peculiar to his office, under better direction than that of Bingo. While he knew very well that I came to him without any previous experience, apparently he never gave this fact the slightest consideration. Others might have assumed that I knew nothing and needed to be taught everything; Bingo assumed that I knew everything and needed to be taught nothing. As a matter of fact,

in spite of my association with the playhouse as a critic, of the commonest affairs of its business side I was densely ignorant, but I felt instinctively that he was testing my patience, my endurance and my ability.

They were heart-breaking days, those first five or six weeks. And to this hour so well do I recall the suffering I went through then that even time and Broadway working together have not entirely dulled my sympathy for others who undergo a similar experience. My work was made the harder because of my ignorance and my anxiety was always the greater because I found my work so hard.

Only once during this period did I ever send out a call for assistance and then, fortunately for the sake of my record at least, I never voiced it. I telephoned to another press agent, a man for whom I had performed more than one friendly service and who was under some obligation to me — but his greeting over the wire was so emphatically frigid and forbidding that my question never left my lips.

Then and there, I learned one of my first lessons — that theatrical Broadway is without heart or soul. There are exceptions, of course, but too few in number to affect the general fact, and while Broadway can be generous on occasion, its generosity nine times out of ten is more hys-

terical than genuine. Its sympathy, too, is largely simulated and its expressions of interest, whatever their nature, are without sincerity. Absorbed in its own affairs, selfish, self-centered and self-conscious, it exhibits some of its very best play-acting when it pretends to be otherwise.

Every year there is a small army of men and women who must learn this as I learned it in those weeks in Bingo's office — through experience. And to few of them indeed will the experience be any kinder or gentler than it was to me. If others who have come to New York as I came — making not only an abrupt departure from associations both familiar and friendly but engaging at the same time in a new business — were to add their confessions to mine, I am sure they would only reiterate what I have said.

For the women, though, rather than for the men, and for the young women particularly, who come as strangers to a strange city and often to a strange business, is the ordeal most trying and the experience bitterest.

They arrive as Peggy arrived, unprepared, and Peggy in a good many respects is typical, but she came possessed of one advantage at least that few enjoy — she had a friend at court. The other girls whose feet tread the same path must depend upon themselves. They come no one knows whence and they go no one knows whither. But

in passing, whether the transit is long or short, girlish innocence and sweetness vanish from their faces and in their place comes a hardness that only one other kind of experience that I know of will set on the countenance of a young woman.

The beginning of each theatrical season brings its new army of these girls to Broadway and by far the greater part are without the slightest knowledge of the conditions they will encounter. Hope burns high in their breasts and the optimism of youth minimizes risks and hazards, magnifies opportunity and construes chance into certainty. They are always confident, and the last thing, apparently, that they ever dream they may require is one of the things they are most likely, sooner or later, to need and to need desperately — a return ticket home.

Only a few have forethought enough to equip themselves with this simple means of insurance against the unhappy hour when all other resources are exhausted. The others, only too often longing for it in vain, their little capital fast dwindling away, are soon numbered among those pathetic applicants who besiege the offices of managers and agents, forcing mirthless smiles through their tears, suffering as no one can fancy and living no one knows how.

A recital of the discouraging facts, however, is about as futile as it is thankless. It is heeded by

others no more than it was heeded by Peggy. Still, every girl who comes to New York with the definite intention of going on the stage ought to come with her eyes open. Whether it dissuades her or not, she ought to know that theatrical Broadway knows chastity only to prey upon it if it can and that the atmosphere of the stage is insidiously and persistently demoralizing. It takes more than mere strength of resolution to withstand the former; it takes vigilance, shrewdness, even diplomacy. And to resist the influence of the latter it takes all these and more besides — a sophistication that can detect sophistry in its most plausible form, unmask it and reject it and a will of adamant to resist insistent temptation. Innocence that is without knowledge can fight only a losing fight against Broadway; against the other, innocence even when armed with knowledge has a poor weapon until it learns when and how and whom to fight. And by that time the fight is often useless — there is nothing left to fight for.

A statement like this is likely to meet with the charge that the maker of it is "preaching." Broadway hates this kind of "preaching" and hates the "preacher" and a person does not live a year on Broadway until he resents being called a "preacher." But this is not "preaching." It is a plain statement of fact. I am not moralizing; I am no reformer. I am simply telling the

truth. Broadway is bad, but bad as it is, the stage is worse. This is true, of course, provided society's accepted code of morals is right and the stage's defiance of the code is wrong. I defend neither and attack neither. They are at opposite extremes, and if one is good the other is bad, but which is which I am not presuming to say. I am only describing my lobster.

It is said by way of excuse for the number of players' scandals, intrigues and divorces exposed in the press that, being in the public eye, their affairs of this sort are unduly exploited — that they are not, in fact, greater in number or worse in character than similar affairs of others in other walks of life but are only made to seem so through the unfortunate but unavoidable publicity. This is part of the truth but not all of it. The fact is, we hear so much about the scandals mainly because there are so many scandals to hear about and even then what we hear is as nothing compared to what we might hear. The stage — or the profession, to be exact — is honeycombed with what society, rightly or wrongly, calls immorality. And that, to be candid, is calling it by as mild a term as possible.

But to return to the girls who come to New York to go on the stage. In their own little circles in their own homes these girls are generally the most attractive, the brightest, the most

vivacious; they can sing, dance, play the piano better than their companions. And, generally, they are the most popular. Their leadership is natural; it is won by virtue of their abilities and their talents. But, when the stage-struck days come — and come they do — they forget that New York is not home and they overlook the very important fact that when they arrive on Broadway they will be thrown not with girls they led at home, but with girls who were also the leaders back in their own various communities.

They cease to shine then by contrast and the very things that formerly distinguished them are possessed in common by the thousands of girls who are seeking precisely what they are seeking. It might not be so bad even then for all the Peggys and her sisters, the Mary Janes and the Elizabeth Anns who make perennial pilgrimage to New York if producing managers made intelligence and mental training tests for fitness. But they don't and they won't and it is doubtful if they could if they would. Above everything else they demand good looks, good figure, good proportions and that mysterious, indefinable something that is called " personality." These the manager seeks first, and what is meant by them, save, perhaps, the last, it is needless to explain. And in choosing first on this basis he is merely giving the theater-going public what the theater-going public

wants; he is interpreting its demand and supplying it.

As for "personality," I don't believe it has ever been adequately defined — probably it never will be. It differs in different persons, but its effect is practically the same. It is a kind of intangible, elusive radium emanation that defies analysis, but it can do more to convert a sow's ear into a silk purse than anything else in the world. Under its magic spell, downright ugliness may seem to be beauty and stupidity may easily enough be mistaken for brilliance. It is the quality that every successful actor and actress possesses and without which no actor and no actress rises to any appreciable height in the profession. It flashes across the footlights more effectively than beauty, ability and experience combined and, while the spectator himself, perhaps, is not aware of the fact, he applauds it more than he applauds anything else.

The Peggys and Mary Janes have personality, but, except in rare instances — in the case of one in a thousand — they haven't enough, unfortunately, to do them any good. They have only enough to do them harm. It is like a little knowledge — a dangerous thing. It attracts and it is attracted and it is thrown into an environment where the restraint of convention is disregarded and where the very first thing a woman who

enters it abandons is the thing that protects her most — her modesty. The exigencies of the profession itself frequently force her to lay this aside.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE STAGE

EXPERIENCE has taught me that the girl who succeeds in the theatrical profession to no greater extent than to remain in it in the capacity of member of the chorus or singer or player of a small and unimportant part must have the qualities I have named — good looks, good figure, good proportions and personality. In addition, she must have Youth — or the appearance of it — strength, energy, vivacity and almost perfect health.

"What most impresses you about these girls?" I once asked an acquaintance who sat with me during the final rehearsals of a musical comedy chorus.

My companion thought a moment.

"Why," said he, "it's their everlasting superabundance of physical energy."

The girls in question had rehearsed for a week nearly twelve hours every day — dancing, singing, marching, counter-marching, hopping, jumping, leaping. On this particular day they had been at it more than fourteen hours when we

dropped in at the rehearsal. Yet, even when they might have rested, they didn't; they were on their feet, tireless, teaching each other the latest Tango steps or the newest evolutions of the Hesitation Waltz.

Put two and two together. Add to the "superabundance of physical energy" vivacity, youth, freedom from convention's restraint and take this combination plus conditions that make for familiarity, subtract modesty and add temptation, unlimited opportunity and youth's inevitable desire for a "good time" and see what the result is. You don't need algebra to work it out. Then remember, too, that indiscretions, to use the mildest term possible, and worse than indiscretions, are not punished in professional circles by ostracism. If they were, precious few players today, men or women, would be on speaking terms with each other. Moral laxity is condoned; it is even sanctioned. No one cares what anyone else does and glass houses are too common for any indulgence in stone-throwing.

"I was in a certain producer's office several years ago," said a New York dramatic critic to me the other day, "and he introduced me to a young woman who, since then, has attained considerable importance on the stage. 'She's the most unsophisticated girl I've seen in a long time,' said the manager and there was something in his

way of saying it that meant more than the words themselves conveyed. A moment later, I was left alone with the girl.

" ' Mr. Blank is the finest man I ever met,' she confided. ' And his attitude toward me certainly shows that managers aren't what they're said to be. Why, he says he'll be a father to me! ' "

" Unsophisticated, indeed! ' See here,' I said, ' Just take a tip from me. Beware of the manager who is going to be a father or a brother or an uncle or a cousin or anything else of the kind. Accept no favors; get where you can by yourself and on your own resources.'

" Two or three years later, after this girl had scored a big success that practically made her between sunset and sunrise, I met her at a dinner party. I'd forgotten about the advice I'd given her and I doubt if I ever would have thought about it again if she hadn't come to me and reminded me of it.

" ' I never forgot what you said that day in Blank's office,' she said, recalling the incident, ' and I've acted on it ever since.'

" ' Well,' said I, ' did Blank engage you? '

" ' No,' she laughed, ' he didn't! ' "

This suggests another indictment to be brought against the conventional matter that is usually written about the stage and its players. The writers of this light, glittery, superficial stuff gen-

erally confine themselves to the exploitation of men and women who have achieved a fair degree of success. They say absolutely nothing about the thousands who have failed. The reader, therefore, is led to believe that success is general, that it is far more common than it is or can be or ever will be, and that it comes without effort, without labor, without sacrifice. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even a very slight amount of success is purchased at a tremendous cost and, oftentimes, it proves far less profitable after it is gained than the public has been led to believe.

Employment is precarious and engagements are indefinite. So when it is said, or whispered about knowingly, that this actor or that actress receives $200 or $400 a week, the sum seems large — beautifully large. But I know a score of actors and actresses who command this salary and who have drawn it in the last six months only twice — the rest of the time they were idle or rehearsing. It's one thing to be down on the producer's list as a player receiving $200 a week and quite another thing to be getting it. Managers are perfectly willing to pay it, to be sure, if they have to and if their production is a success. But if the production is a failure, it is withdrawn and the player is out of employment. Another engagment, with more dreary rehearsing, may fol-

low immediately or not for half a season or, possibly, not until a new season is begun.

The government, in short, is not going to fill its coffers with income tax paid by actors and actresses. So, when Mary Jane and Elizabeth Ann see pictures of Miss Footlight's summer home and more pictures of her Riverside Drive apartment and read details of the routine of her life with maids and butlers and chauffeurs at her command, let them do a little thinking. Purveyors of this tinselled literature very likely know full well that Miss Footlight has other means of support besides acting — they know it, but they ignore it.

Girls in the chorus receive about fifteen dollars a week in New York — some, here and there, a little more perhaps. On the road, or out of town, their salary is increased to eighteen. If this weekly wage were received regularly, every week in the year, it might be worth considering. But, unfortunately, it is not. Nothing at all is paid during rehearsals, and rehearsals, frequently, last for five or six weeks and even longer. I know one company that recently rehearsed nine weeks and played two. The chorus girls received two weeks' salary, thirty dollars — not a very large sum, it must be admitted, with which to pay for board and lodging and clothing, to say nothing of other necessary expenses, for eleven

weeks. And some of the girls who appeared in this short-lived production were without employment for two months following its withdrawal. If you are eager to go on the stage and are perfectly willing to begin in the lowly capacity of "extra" woman or chorus girl, by way of convincing yourself that the life is all you believe it to be, try living nineteen weeks on thirty dollars.

But, you say, you have talent and ability and managers are always looking for these. You are wrong. That is merely another illusion that the false literature fosters. It may be true that managers think they are looking for them but I doubt whether they ever succeed in fooling themselves to the extent of really believing it. When players have scored successes in various rôles, then it is quite true, managers want them. Seeing is believing. But managers are not discovering talent; talent is discovering itself. If you were an unknown Mrs. Fiske, your only chance to demonstrate it would come to you by accident. Untried is unknown to the theatrical producer and he is making no experiments. You may be possessed of all the ability necessary to make you a great star in a few seasons, but, to do anything or to get anywhere in the profession, you will first have to be lucky enough to get a small part that will enable you to attract attention to your acting and thus to your ability. But, when choice falls

between a girl with experience and without talent, and a girl with talent and without experience, the former wins.

I have heard no less a manager than Lee Shubert bemoan the fact that he could not find the players he wanted. William A. Brady has sadly shaken his head over the prospect and declared again and again in my presence that there are no more competent actors and actresses. At the time Shubert was bewailing the paucity of players, there were fifty young men and women in his reception room, all asking nothing more than an opportunity to show what they could do. And Brady, at the same time, was deliberately remaining away from his office in order to avoid a long line of ambitious applicants. If any of these patient waiters had come with a letter of introduction from some man or woman of influence an audience might have been granted, but even that is by no means a certainty.

What I have said of these two producers is true of the others as well. There is no open front door into their presence. The applicant must tarry by the way until he or she has cultivated acquaintances who can shunt them in by the back-door entrances.

I remember not long ago when a prominent producer — Lee Shubert, to be explicit — was sighing for "acts" for a vaudeville program.

" I can't find them," he moaned. Two days later, I happened to be out of town, and my attention was drawn by a member of one of our companies to a young woman among the " extras." She was a dancer, and one of unusual ability and training. Immediately my mind reverted to the producer who was in need of just such a specialty. Indeed, he had particularly mentioned his desire for a dancer of precisely this girl's class.

I gave her a letter of introduction, not only to the producer, but to two or three of his important lieutenants. Several weeks later, the girl came to see me. For more than a fortnight she had called almost daily at the producer's office but, despite her hours of waiting, she had never been able to get beyond the secretarial guardian at the threshold of the Shubert office.

This is not an exceptional instance but a typical case. This girl, ready to " go on " at a moment's notice, possessed of youth, ambition, attractive features, good figure and a charming personality, cannot gain even an opportunity to display her wares. She must remain hidden in a chorus until, if she is lucky, she can cultivate influences that will obtain for her what her talent cannot get by itself. And in cultivating these influences, which are not in the habit of doing something or giving something for nothing, in most instances, she pays with the only sort of pay they want or will

accept or that she has to give. This is frank. It is not pleasant and it will not be found in those alluring and deceptive articles that Mary Jane and Elizabeth Ann read and believe and build their dreams on, but it is fact.

The morals of individuals are no affair of mine and, to be candid, I have been in the theatrical business so long that I personally don't care a rap what anybody does or how or why they do it. The atmosphere itself begets this sort of indifference and it works its way, somehow, into one's system, gradually, insidiously, but thoroughly, like a habit-forming drug. The dose of it that sickens today is tomorrow's necessity. Behind the curtain, the familiarity, the innuendo, the suggestion that shock the novice tonight go unheeded tomorrow night and so on, night by night, week by week, until the time comes when old standards no longer prevail, when nothing shocks and nothing seems improper or wrong or immoral. And, for all I know, nothing is. One can hope so, at least.

The girl who wants to go on the stage ought to know this, whether it deters her or not. Ignorance on her part will not help her any and it certainly will afford her no protection. I venture to say that Peggy Hall, in her first week at the Circle, suffered more shocks than in all the previous years of her life put together. But that was bound to occur, for I have never yet seen the

chorus — and I have seen a good many — in which there was not at least two or three girls who were coarse and vulgar beyond description. Even a drunken sailor would be astonished at their command of indecent language, and as for their morals — God help them — they apparently never had any. Their influence, however, is not half so bad for the novice as that of the purring little cat who is seemingly all virtue and gentleness and modesty, but whose sophistication at twenty is not surpassed by that of the fifty-year-old rounder in whose company she dines after the performance.

CHAPTER V

THE PATH OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

THERE was one thing about Peggy Hall that was in the nature of a pleasing surprise. It was a novelty. She never tried to make capital out of the circumstances that had brought her to my office. She never tried to make use of my position. She stood squarely on her own feet. She had delivered her letter of introduction, had placed herself in a way under my guardianship, but she had gone forth then to do for herself, to win on her own merit and it never occurred to her, I am sure, that my influence was in any way responsible for her first employment. Nor did I enlighten her. I admired her pluck and independence for I know only too well the tendency of all of Broadway to make the most out of circumstances and wrest every advantage possible out of an influential friendship.

It is the habit of Broadway to presume on acquaintance and so often have I seen friendship abused through attempts to convert it into capital, that I have made it a rule to be especially guarded in the matter of meeting players except on a busi-

ness basis. It is mighty hard to refuse employment to anyone in need of it, but it is a great deal harder to refuse it to an old friend when every sign proclaims his necessity. Many a time, a slight friendship, made in a quarter where all seemed snug and safe, has turned out to have unforeseen embarrassments.

No one can tell, for instance, when an apparently sane and level-headed man, who talks business with you sensibly and who proves to be a person worth knowing, will go stark, raving mad and begin to write a play. Indeed, it sometimes seems, everybody begins. Fortunately, only about ten thousand a year finish. Most of these undertake the writing of a play after seeing some good play performed — for seeing a good play, for some strange reason, immediately inspires playwriting. It has the effect of making playwriting seem easy. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that it moves along gracefully from first act to last and is simple, direct and logical with a certain inevitableness about its sequence of scenes and incidents.

"Why," thinks the spectator, "I could do that myself." But he forgets that the very qualities which make the task of playwriting seem easy are the most difficult to supply. Nor does he realize that even if he succeeds in writing a play it is far from likely that he will ever see it produced. For

there is no product of the human brain harder to market than the manuscript of a play. Producers pretend to be in a feverish quest for material but that is nothing more than a pose. The fact is, the offices of American producers are sheltering hundreds of unsolicited manuscripts that never have been read and never will be read. In Bingo's office when I first went to work for him, there was a pile of manuscripts that could not have contained less than five hundred plays. The other day I visited Bingo and, in the same old office, in the same old corner, was the same old pile, and I should not be surprised to learn that the pile contained some of the same old manuscripts. This is true to a greater or less extent of every producing office in New York City.

Algernon Smith, reading the apparently sincere effusion of Bingo's press agent, in which Bingo is made to say that he is always eager to have 'scripts sent to him, that he reads them carefully and thoroughly, rushes to the Greentown postoffice and hopefully forwards to Bingo's headquarters the latest product of his pen. Bingo's secretary signs the registered package receipt and, two or three months later, in answer to a demand from Algernon for some verdict on his 'script, the same employé wearily picks Algernon's play from the dusty pile, where it has reposed undisturbed from the moment of its receipt, and

with a polite note of rejection — signed by Bingo's name but which Bingo never sees — returns it to its owner.

It may happen — and more than once it has happened — that Algernon has submitted an exceedingly valuable property for Bingo's inspection. But, a year or two later, when, perhaps the play is running on Broadway and "turning 'em away," Bingo will be surprised to read some morning that the 'script had been in his hands and by him rejected. To deny this is to confess that he never read it, and Bingo cannot afford to do that. He remains silent, therefore, though he smarts under the charge that his judgment was bad.

The producer lives to produce and he produces to live. His indifference to the possibilities of 'scripts is therefore all the more difficult to understand. It is true, of course, that some producers employ play-readers, but their reading is more of a formality than anything else. Still, in the last two or three seasons, there has been some improvement in the matter of the attention paid to the unsolicited play, and though it falls far short of being in any sense commensurate with the demand for improvement, it is a movement in the right direction. Nothing of substantial value, however, will be accomplished until the producer assumes a more encouraging attitude toward the

playwright, and this he never will do until he first comes to a realization of what fair treatment to a playwright's manuscript demands. At present he is neither fair nor courteous; he is indifferent, careless, evasive and rude.

Striking an approximate average, I should say that five manuscripts a day are received by each of the prominent producing managers of New York. Some receive more and some fewer, but, day in and day out, this figure is not far from the mark. Only one in the five is copyrighted, and since the records of the copyright office show that about two thousand manuscripts are registered annually, it is safe to assume that the total product amounts to ten thousand a year. Of this annual output, less than one hundred reach the stage in the course of a season — so it is apparent that only one per cent at the most, one out of every hundred, is possessed of sufficient value to appeal to the producer. But it should be remembered that not a few of the plays produced are of foreign origin or have been written to order — a fact which still further reduces the meager chances of the unknown American writer who submits an unsolicited manuscript to a producer.

It is easy to make an assertion and it is easy to deny it, but experience convinces me that not a fifth of the manuscripts submitted are read. A leading producer who comes forward with the

perennial statement that he reads a thousand manuscripts a year has just delivered himself of his latest effusion on the subject. I lunched with him a day or two ago.

"See here," I said, "do you really mean what you say about reading a thousand 'scripts a year?"

"Of course not," he frankly admitted. "I don't read a hundred. How could I? Where'd I find the time?"

"Then why do you make the statement?"

"Oh," he continued, unabashed, "that story is always good for half a column, more or less, in every big paper from New York to San Francisco. Dramatic editors will print that when it is impossible to get anything else by them."

And so Algernon Smith, biting the end of his pencil in his Greentown library and reading the half-column falsehood, decides to decline the clerkship in the Granger Dry Goods store and to devote another year to the pursuit of his profession.

I talked recently with a young man who came to New York two years ago to sell a play. Today he does not complain because he has sold none but because he has been denied the privilege of showing his goods. By some devious path, he made his way finally to me. Play-reading is not a part of my duties — thank Heaven! — but the modest

sincerity of the young man impressed me and I took two of his plays to read. One of them seemed to me to be unusually good and I sent it, with a note expressing my opinion, to a member of the firm. He read it while on a train en route to Washington and accepted it by wire. That manuscript had been in his office twice, once for a month, when it was voluntarily withdrawn by the author for revision, and again for seven months, when it was returned after he had written half a dozen letters asking for a verdict. On the latter occasion, while the 'script came back, his courteous notes of inquiry elicited no response.

When a playwright sells a play he sells it in the face of the most unfriendly and discouraging market in the world. It is all very well to say that genius thrives on adversity and that rebuff spurs it on to greater effort, but I believe that some persons are naturally too timid, too retiring and too impractical to wage a successful fight for a hearing. They may have the best plays in the world but the world will never know it. Some others, with more influence than ability, more selling-sense than dramatic skill, will succeed where the more worthy fail.

My young playwright acquaintance tells me that some managers held copies of his manuscripts longer than we did and that not only did they fail to reply to his letters but they failed also

to return the manuscripts. Nor could he obtain them, or satisfaction of any sort, even by applying in person. He was treated with contempt as often as not and never by any chance with the slightest degree of encouragement.

I know a prominent fiction writer — unknown as a playwright — who has written what strikes me as an excellent farce. A manuscript sent from his pen to any editor or publisher in this country, or even England, for that matter, would command immediate attention whether it was finally accepted or not. But the novelist's farce, submitted to a prominent producer and in response to his personal request, too, has been in the producer's hands for eighteen months and the author has never had as much as a letter acknowledging its arrival. If he did not possess a registry receipt signed by an employé of the firm and did not have the letter from the manager himself, bearing his signature, requesting that the play be submitted, he would hardly be able to believe, he says, that he had actually sent it to the producer.

This is nothing, however, compared to Thompson Buchanan's experience. He told me once that a play of his, "According To Fate," if I recall the title, remained with a manager eight years. Indeed, he showed me correspondence to prove it. Where had the manuscript been all that time? "I believe," Buchanan said, "that it

reposed in a dusty vault with several hundred other plays and was brought to light when the firm moved its offices recently." Charles Neidlinger, who wrote "The World and His Wife," and several other plays, used to tell how the former lay in one manager's office nine months before he received any word regarding it. The manager then asked him how he wished the manuscript returned. "Never mind returning it," Neidlinger replied. "It is playing in a theater not half a block from your office." Later the playwright learned that the manager himself never knew the manuscript was in his office.

A young author writing me recently to ask my help in obtaining a hearing for him, said that he had proved to his own satisfaction by repeated trial that it was worse than useless to try to market a play by mail. "I have spent," his letter says, "about two years of actual working time writing plays and trying to get them read. I have spent in money to the same end $3500. I quote the rest verbatim:

"I could tell you dozens and scores of things that have ground my pride and almost crushed my hopes for a decent consideration, but to recount them only serves to make me feel that it is not worth while. If I ever should win, and I feel confident that I will, that which will have carried me through is that quality which other playwrights

with finer imagination and a keener feeling have not got, courage.

"I have had plays returned unopened, some so insecurely wrapped that the manuscript was absolutely ruined; and some, a dozen or more, never returned at all.

"And here is another experience: an actor told a play agent that I had written a good play from a short story of mine, which was originally published in a leading magazine. The actor was so enthusiastic that the agent came to see me, remained to Sunday dinner with my family, and went away with the 'script under his arm.

"Two months later I called on him, not having had any replies to my letters asking how things were going, and he told me he had not had a chance to read it. I took it away in the package in which I had given it to him. He meant all right, but — ye gods! what can a playwright do?

"Then this very same play was read by ——. Changes were suggested and made, and I received a letter from the general manager, enclosing a copy of the report of the readers, and telling me ——, the principal play reader, was enthusiastic about it. Mr. —— told me so himself. But a press agent thought it wasn't quite the thing. However, two plays on the same subject have since made a lot of money in New York!

CHAPTER VI

SUBMITTING A PLAY

It seems to me, in view of the adverse conditions, that it is not to be wondered at that we have so few really good plays. The wonder is that we have good plays at all. Publishers and magazine editors, I am informed, are always on the lookout for new and promising authors. The editor-in-chief of a leading publishing firm told me the other day with pride how he and his assistants "discovered" some of the prominent fiction writers of the day. The list was a long one and certainly interesting.

"We used to see an occasional short story by Blank," he told me, "printed in some of the more obscure magazines. Something in Blank's style impressed me with the idea that he could write a novel and write a good one. I wrote to him, urged him to try his hand at it and, finally, he consented. The result was one of the season's six best sellers."

He told of many such instances, and from others I have heard the same thing — how, everywhere, the author who displays the slightest genuine ability is encouraged and his products con-

structively criticised until he finally develops into an experienced and successful writer. "Discoveries" are eagerly sought and, when found, are hailed with delight. How different is the experience of the "unknown" playwright! The door is deliberately shut in his face and if he gets in at all he must break in or sneak in.

It is quite true that the manager is a busy man, and that he cannot afford to waste his time in unprofitable interviews with fledgling writers. But, while he hastens to present this as an excuse, no one is asking or expecting it of him. Publishers, I assume, are also busy men, but, long ago, they learned that it pays and pays handsomely to be on the lookout for new material from new authors.

A woman playwright who came from the Pacific coast to sell a play, devoted a year to the task and then returned home to find her 'script accepted by a producer who hails from her own city. Everywhere she went in New York, the play-readers she saw were almost insultingly contemptuous.

"They invariably told me," she confided, "that I was not 'in the profession.' One man declared that in all the years he had been reading 'scripts he could not remember one instance where the play of an inexperienced playwright had been accepted."

That statement, of course, was stupid and ob-

viously untrue, for there must be a beginning to everyone's career and the first 'script from any author is certainly a 'script from an inexperienced writer.

"Clyde Fitch was not born 'in the profession,'" the playwright responded. The play-reader looked at her.

"But," he said, deliberately, "you're not a Clyde Fitch, you know."

Perhaps not; then, again, perhaps yes. Who knows?

"We're always looking for Clyde Fitches," said another play-reader to me one day.

"You didn't find Clyde Fitch," I replied. "He found you."

It is my opinion that the play-readers engaged by New York producers are, for the most part, incompetent. Indeed they seem to be employed more for the purpose of disposing of the playwright than for appraising his work.

I would not give a dollar for the opinion of all of them put together — and I am inclined to the belief that this is also what most of their employers think of them. Some of them have actually so expressed themselves, in confidence, of course.

Many of these readers have no breadth of view at all. With possibly an occasional exception, they are all narrowly provincial and are, or

appear to be, utterly oblivious of the fact that there is a great area of our country lying west of the Palisades. A good many managers are similarly circumscribed in view, and this largely accounts for the fact that, in recent seasons, many plays have been failures "on the road" that have been at least fair successes in New York.

Now and then a big, broad, comprehensive play makes its way to the stage, reflecting, as every play should, the thoughts and feelings and emotions of the great public generally, and proves to the manager, or ought to prove to him, that it pays to remember that New York is only a small dot on the map after all and that there is a large, a very large population, that is geographically and even emotionally and intellectually remote from Manhattan Island. The firm that employs me knows nothing of the country west of the Alleghanies. To be sure, its members think they do, but, unfortunately, that does not make a fact of their theory. They came from up-state New York; Broadway was their goal and, before they came, when they came and after they came, Broadway was the beginning and end of their thoughts, hopes and aspirations. Today they live Broadway and think Broadway and produce for Broadway.

Someday, a producer will appear who will pay more attention to this end of his business. He

will realize its importance. He will have not one reader only but three or four, or half a dozen for that matter, and the reports from these on the manuscripts they read will be carefully considered by the manager. He will attach some value to unanimity of opinion among his readers, who will be chosen not for their Broadway sophistication, but solely for their ability to judge and appraise with fair degree of accuracy. And all 'scripts will be promptly considered — as they are in the publishing business. When this policy has prevailed a year the manager who adopts it will find that he is getting his choice of plays by known playwrights as well as those by unknown playwrights. He will find that he is receiving the plays first with first chance to select from them. And if his readers are men and women of good judgment and he himself is a manager of good judgment he will monopolize the best of the business because he will monopolize the best of the plays.

On every producer's staff of readers there should be a representative of the West — of the remote and despised "provinces," some one who is too Western in taste and thought and habit to be easily Broadwayized. For the West can give New York something that New York does not seem to be able to give itself — a clearer, kindlier view of humankind. It can supply this because it

has a keener, readier, sincerer sympathy for humankind. It is interested in people. A family out in my native city knows all the other families in the neighborhood; the children are playfellows and the parents are friends. Sickness brings immediate offers of assistance; joys and griefs are shared. This makes for the cultivation of interest in men and women — real interest — and New York does not know it or feel it. What it mistakes for interest is curiosity.

I believe this sympathy, this human interest, has its value in writing drama, and appraising drama. I think it is essential for the playwright and for the play-reader and, incidentally, for the professional play critic. Publishers have found it so and employ it accordingly. But the producer is at least a quarter of a century behind the publisher in turning it to account.

A change will come, I am sure; it is inevitable. But, in the meantime, I am afraid that many a good play will go unread and many a hopeful young dramatist will be cruelly discouraged. I have never written a play myself and, strangely enough, since I have been in the theatrical business, I never thought of writing a play. I began one, it is true, some twelve or fifteen years ago, but I got no further than a scenario. I say this because I do not want anyone to labor under the suspicion that I am, in any measure, a disap-

pointed playwright myself. I am not, and my attitude toward "unknown" playwrights is Broadway's attitude. I don't want them around me; I don't want to be disturbed by them. I have enough to do as it is. But I am aware, nevertheless, that my attitude is entirely wrong and, largely because I soon shall have left Broadway and the theatrical business far behind, I can indulge in the satisfaction of the confession.

Playwrights are not prone to take advice. On the other hand, they are too prone to grasp at straws. But if it fell to my lot to advise a young dramatist what to do with his product I would counsel him to send his play — but only after he is satisfied that it is as perfect as he himself can make it — to some play-broker or agent. There are two or three reliable agents and they are alive to the demands of the producers, know what they want, know their needs, know to whom the play should be submitted and how to submit it and how to obtain immediate consideration. Producers respect these agents, place faith in their judgment and pay some heed to their recommendations. The reliable agent will not submit a manuscript to a producer when he knows the work to be without merit. Oftentimes, too, through the agent's advice and suggestion and criticism of a play an unpromising 'script has been converted into a salable and valuable property.

Another effective means of getting a manuscript promptly before a producer is to interest some prominent player. A good actor or actress with a good manuscript in hand is welcome in any producer's office and will gain immediately a ready ear. This is a procedure, however, that is hardly practicable for the writer who is not a resident of New York. For those remote from Broadway, the other course is the safest, surest and quickest. Seeing the producer personally is, of course, best of all, but that is practically impossible for the unknown writer. If he gains the audience, however, by some means or other, he will serve his cause best if he submits a brief scenario rather than a completed play. The manager might read this, because of its brevity, where he would not read the play as a whole.

The firm that employs me began this last season with nineteen plays ready for production. It may interest prospective playwrights to learn that of these, five came from abroad, seven more were musical productions " built up," for the most part, in rehearsal, four were by playwrights each of whom has at least two previous successes to his credit, two by playwrights whose first plays — neither of which was a success — were produced the previous season, and the remaining play was by a new dramatist, her first production, whose 'script came to us from the office of a play-broker.

CHAPTER VII

TEARS AND SMILES

"THE melancholy days are come," I always quote to myself about the first week in September. And the remark has nothing at all to do with the weather. The weather, as a matter of fact, is usually ideal, but, in early September, theatrical Broadway begins to stage its dramas in real life. They are not apparent to the inexperienced eye, for it is only when the drama suddenly twists itself into grim and ugly tragedy that the casual observer is made aware of its existence. To one who is possessed of knowledge and experience, however, the curtain is drawn aside. He sees what is concealed from the less sophisticated eye.

On my desk are lists of players employed and unemployed. I know fairly well from frequent perusal of the names who is engaged and who, to use that ominously euphonious phrase of theaterdom, is "at liberty." And so, when I walk on the streets these days, and pass the players I know, the smiles they wear convey no false impression to me. I know who smiles by right and who smiles by force. The man who seems to be

merriest, who appears to know neither care nor worry, is very frequently the man whose anxiety is the greatest, whose condition is the most desperate and whose heart is the heaviest.

The actor believes that, prosperous or not, he must appear prosperous. And he is right, for in no profession do appearances count for so much. To some of them, though, there comes a time when, strive as they may, appearances can no longer be maintained. Their necessity betrays itself and nothing worse could befall an actor. Thereafter he fights, not any longer to get to the top, but to keep from going to the bottom. His professional career is on the decline and the descent is rapid. He seldom recovers and, as long as life remains, he faces the bitter necessity of hunting desperately for any sort of employment he can find.

I was standing on Broadway the other day, talking for a moment with one of the most prominent leading men of the day. A man shabbily dressed but still spotlessly clean approached us and asked, politely, for a word with me. He wanted work; he had heard that we needed extra men for a spectacular production we were rehearsing and he begged for a place in the ranks.

When first I came to New York, this man occupied a position similar to that held today by the high-salaried actor to whom I was talking. The

contrast was sharp, and almost unconsciously, my gaze went from one to the other.

"Ten years from now," I thought to myself, "where will both these men be?"

Players are improvident. Only a few of them save. The actor, when employed, spends freely and lives well, and his fidelity to the theory that he must always appear prosperous compels him to go on living at the same high rate when his income ceases. What he manages to save, therefore, is soon exhausted if he is long out of work — and that is oftenest his condition — and when the savings are gone, as long as credit can be had, his style of living remains unchanged. When again an engagement provides him with an income, old debts must be settled and old accounts squared before more money can be laid away. With nine-tenths of the most prominent players today their liabilities exceed their assets; they are bankrupt.

"He was a fine actor in his day," said my companion, as the figure of the old player disappeared.

"He was indeed," I replied.

I have heard the phrase so often that it strikes me now less impressively than formerly. But, back of it, there is yet to me a more poignant drama than any that fancy can devise. The phrase is at once a biography and an epitaph.

"He was a fine actor in his day." What glory of achievement, what pride, what memories, what

disappointments, what grievous heart-aches, what hopelessness, and, finally, what helplessness the expression suggests! "In his day," he heard the theater ring with applause; "in his day," he acted with the best, his services were in demand, he was respected, he was admired; "in his day," his name was familiar from coast to coast, his portrait appeared in newspapers and magazines and adorned bill-boards, he was famous. But the "day" ended, the twilight fell and after it the darkness and obscurity. And now the pitiful, pitiless fight in the night. The tragedy of such failure, it seems to me, is that it does not kill.

"I want to rub out and fade away," said to-day's leading man to me, "with my last good suit of clothes."

"You will," thought I to myself, "professionally, at least."

My sympathies, however, are always keenest for the women of the profession, and for the young as well as for the old. Somehow, the men can manage and do manage, but the women, with youth and beauty and strength departed, can find no employment even in the ranks of the extras. And the young girl, with hope leaping high, whose confidence is unshaken and who has youth's faith in life and in the certainty of success — how bitterly heavy is the hand that disappointment lays on her.

In the "melancholy days," one sees her on every side, smiling, always smiling, fighting bravely to keep her head above water and doubly sorrowful through it all, no doubt, because she must forego that solace which women find in reciting their woes to sympathetic ears. But the unwritten law of the profession which forbids the player to admit his need seals her lips. With the last little frock frayed and worn, washing today's shirtwaist for tomorrow's wear, with the few remaining nickels too precious to spend for street-car fare, with hunger driving her on, each day she makes her weary rounds of the theatrical employment agencies, holding fast to her courage, and hopeful even in the face of repeated failure. At night she smiles her way back to her wretched little room and not until its door is closed and she is safe in its solitude does the smile vanish. The tears may come then if they will for no one is there to see. Hope made strong by necessity supports the searcher in the day, but what of the hours of the night, when sleep refuses to come, and despair sits ever by her side and refuses to be driven away?

Writing home for money, even when money is there to be had — which is too seldom the case — is a final and last resort. To acknowledge even temporary financial straits seems to the sorely tried girl to be equivalent to a confession of fail-

ure, and there is no place on earth where an actress, young or old, recruit or veteran, wants to have the appearance of success and affluence more than at home in her own native town. Many a girl has paid dearly for this pride and, I dare say, many another one will pay as dearly in the future.

The other morning I went to our Garden theater where, next week, the new spectacular production opens its engagement. The time had arrived for the hiring of the supers. I stood a few moments and watched as the stage director inspected the applicants and made his selections. The leading man of yesterday, he who had been "a fine actor in his day," was there with a hundred more of his kind, men and women, all human derelicts, floating rudderless wherever the changing, shifting currents of life happen to send them. A few nights hence, they will surge and crowd on the stage to give the semblance of reality to a mimic street fight.

To the spectator in his comfortable seat in the front of the house, they will represent nothing more than a theatrical spectacle. At the sound of a cue they come and go. But, to the observer who reflects, they represent the real tragedy of the stage. They are the castaways of the profession — the men unshaven, unkempt, or shabbily genteel, and the women, pathetically faded, some in tawdry finery and others modestly and unassum-

ingly dressed. On the very stage where now they appear as supers, it may be that once, in other days, they played leading rôles in famous successes.

In the group was an actor, whose name was familiar the country over when I was still dramatic critic in the Middle West. The face even now was notably distinguished, despite the deep lines, set by want and hardship, and the red and watery eyes. Before I arrived in New York to enter the theatrical business, an American manager had brought him to this country from London at a salary of $400 a week. Today, with less than a decade passed, he is a super for $4 a week. Wine and women versus career — that was the conflict — and the former won. From leading man to "bits" and from "bits" to nothing, the descent had been rapid and the end inevitable. And another in the group, who looked for all the world as though she had come that moment from an East Side pushcart, ten years ago was a "featured" beauty of the musical comedy stage, petted, pampered, wined and dined by the roving millionaire buccaneers of the Broadway main.

"How do you do?" a little man said, coming to my side with an outstretched hand. He spoke in a husky whisper. He, too, had been "a fine actor in his day."

"You wonder, perhaps," he continued, speak-

ing with the precise enunciation of the actor of other years, "what I am doing here?"

"Yes?" I responded, at a loss what to say.

"It's the voice," he went on smiling. "But I am told it will come back. In the meantime — I must work; I must live. But I shall have my old place in the profession again before the season is over."

The eyes looked hopefully into mine.

"I've no doubt of it at all," I lied, cheerfully.

"It's a great contrast, isn't it? Why, I have played before audiences everywhere, before Queen Victoria, Victor Emmanuel of Italy, Alexander II of Russia — in all the Courts. I have visited all the nations of the world; I have been on the stage sixty-five years and I am sixty-six years of age."

He smiled again, at the flood of recollections.

"But I'll be back where I belong before the season is half gone."

Poor chap! Before the season is half gone he will have played the final scene of all. Death already stalks by his side.

In one of our companies last year there were twenty extra men and women, not one of whom had a line to speak. Each received a salary of $18 a week on the road, $15 in New York. Fourteen of the twenty — eight men and six women — no longer than a dozen years ago were comparatively prominent in the profession and

found employment readily at not less than $75 a week. One, whose feelings I shall not further wound by mentioning by name, has charmed thousands throughout the country with his sweet tenor voice, now lost to him forever. Memory of him still abides and reference to him is still frequent but I doubt whether the public at large, which so often applauded him in his prime, ever asks itself what has become of him.

Another was for years one of the foremost impersonators of women characters — of a more or less burlesque nature — and his antics in petticoat garb have brought laughter to a million spectators. When the company played in Boston, business brought me there, and the company wardrobe mistress, herself formerly a musical comedy actress of no mean ability, called my attention to the fact that he was ill and helpless. I found him suffering from inflammatory rheumatism, lying alone and unattended in a wretched lodging house hovel, in dirt and filth, his money exhausted and the slatternly landlady threatening to evict him unless he paid for a week's lodging in advance. Nor were matters improved by the fact that an invalid wife at home in New York was dependent on the meager remittances he could send her from time to time. I laughed in the face of an actor who made the most of my presence on this occasion to ask for an increase in salary, on the basis,

as he carefully explained, that with his income of $250 a week he could not make both ends meet. Perhaps, though, there was more reason in his complaint than appears on the surface, for the principals, and he among them, had rehearsed eight weeks without a penny of salary save what they were able to induce a cautious and reluctant manager to advance them.

I returned to New York from this trip to learn of the death of an actor whose end was hastened, I have no doubt, if not directly caused by anxiety due to unfair treatment on the part of a prominent manager. The manager, himself, however, was merely following a general custom prevailing in managerial circles and practiced by myself, I must confess, whenever occasion seems to warrant it. But, as I said before, I have followed the rules of the game as I found them already laid down; I have followed them because I had to, for, alone — and I should have been altogether alone — I could not change what custom had established and practice sanctioned. In this instance, the manager had contracted with the player, engaging his services and, making small advances from time to time, had thereby placed the actor in his debt. No part, however, was forthcoming — only empty promises. Employment seemed always just ahead — only a week or two away at the most. Finally, the advances ceased and when the

actor made bold to complain, his complaint was greeted with sneers. He threatened legal procedure and was told to go ahead. But going ahead without money was easier said than done and application to the other offices was met with a disinclination to interfere with a player under contract to serve another employer. When he sought a release, it was not granted and, finally, the strain told so heavily that death came suddenly to put an end for all time to the actor's perplexities and anxieties. And when it claimed him, a little woman heard the news dry-eyed and sobless and that night perished by her own hand that she might be, as she explained in the brief note she left behind, with the man she loved.

And I might pile tragedy on tragedy. No other profession in the world writes so many pages of it. No other profession shows contrasts as startling. It has its ups and downs, but the ups seem superlatively high and the downs superlatively low.

"But where is the bright side of theatrical life?" you ask. "Isn't there any?"

Indeed there is. The bright side is the audience's side. The public has a singularly slipshod method of converting an exception into a glittering generality. It hears of the marvelous profits a successful production makes and immediately concludes that all productions are profit-

able. It hears what a theater makes and is eager to build another theater to duplicate the financial success of the first, forgetting that it is increasing the number of playhouses a hundred per cent in a year while the theater-going population has not increased twenty per cent. in the country in ten years. It learns on good authority that this actor or that actress receives $500 a week or two or three times that sum and leaps to the conclusion that this exceptional success is relatively true throughout the profession.

I never see the stage electricians at work with their bunch lights and strips and spots striving to obliterate shadows by flooding the stage with light from all angles, without reflecting that this is precisely what the average observer does mentally so far as the theater is concerned. He sees the high lights and forgets the shadows. The chorus smiles at him from across the magic footlights and he forgets that the chorus is paid to smile and that behind the smile there may be and generally is such misery as he little dreams of. Perhaps it is not amiss, then, to lay some emphasis on the other side, the side of which it is neither profitable nor pleasant to write nor scarcely enjoyable to read. But there it is nevertheless and directing attention to it may be the means of staying the incautious feet of Mary Jane from straying down a path that too often proves only a treach-

erous by-way. I am trying to establish a sign on the road — Proceed Slowly; Dangerous Turn Ahead.

It has been six years since I have encouraged anyone to go on the stage, and I wish today with all my heart that the young woman I then advised to enter the profession had never heard the counsel from my lips. I found her in an Ohio city. I was making a tour of inspection of theaters and in the city where she lived I had finished my business and gone to the station only to find my train several hours late. It was an evening in early spring, unseasonably warm, and I boarded a street car for a ride to the outskirts of the city and back. When I alighted to catch a returning car, a sudden shower caused me to seek shelter in the only place that offered — a moving picture theater. I stood in the rear with my attention on the audience more than on the screen until I was suddenly aware that a young girl had appeared on the rude platform stage and was singing. Her voice was remarkable, untrained though it was, strikingly impressive and it was immediately apparent that behind it was a singularly fascinating personality. Despite the fact that she had selected songs not at all calculated to appeal to her hearers, the audience liked her, applauded her and demanded an encore. I saw in her, to be brief, that rare combination of youth, magnetism, talent and beauty

that gives success in such liberal measure to those fortunate enough to possess them. She was a "find," a "discovery." I sought the manager, made a few cautious inquiries, learned her name — Alice Carey I shall call her — and gathered the additional information that she was paid a dollar a night for her singing. More about her he did not know and most certainly he was not aware that the girl had more than ordinary ability.

"Will she sing again?" I asked.

"Yes — once more and then she's done for the night."

A little later, before the second song was ended, I slipped away and stood in the shadows in the rear of the little theater until I saw the door open and the singer emerge. She was alone and without more ado I walked up to her and spoke. She was frightened but I hastened my explanation and, though still suspicious when together we boarded an inbound car, I had reassured her partially at least. She was entirely convinced, I think, of the truth of my explanation when we left the car at the entrance of our local theater and she found herself witnessing the final scenes of the light opera that was the week's attraction.

There was method in my procedure, for I had great respect for the opinion of the orchestra leader of the company and, for that matter, for the verdict also of the stage manager. Not at all

abashed, little Alice Carey consented to sing for these gentlemen at the conclusion of the performance and their judgment confirmed my own.

The upshot of it all was a contract with the girl and an agreement for her to join the company a week later when it passed through the city again enroute eastward. A month afterward the company — a new production breaking in on the road for its New York opening — reached Broadway, and was an immediate success. Alice Carey, singing a minor part, was favorably remarked by the critics and well started, it seemed to me, on the road to success and fame.

Seasons come and go and crowd their events fast on the heels of those preceding. Time is short and the days and nights full of work. In a year I had forgotten Alice Carey and even the part I played in her life had faded from my memory.

I was seated in a Broadway café one night with a newspaper man who reported theatrical news for his paper. We were eating a midnight lunch when my attention was attracted by a girl who was sitting alone at a nearby table. Once or twice, when our eyes met, I thought she was about to nod her head in recognition, but the movement was too slight to be depended upon and, as her face was strange to me, I concluded I was wrong. But I could not help noticing that she was drink-

ing and drinking heavily. Her loneliness, the fact that she was loudly dressed in the extreme of the day's most extreme fashion, the tired, wearied, haunted look on her face that rouge and powder did not conceal and her frequent orders to the waiter made passing record on my mind and would have stopped at that, no doubt, if I had not seen the head waiter address her, assist her to her feet and politely, but firmly, send her away. She was ejected.

"It's too bad about that girl," said the reporter, when she had lurched unsteadily past our table. "Two years ago she gave promise of doing fine things."

I was not interested and I made no reply.

"Somebody picked her up," he gossiped on, "in a town out West. She came here in a musical comedy, and because she'd never been thirty miles away from her home before, had never seen the inside of a Pullman or eaten on a diner before she stepped out of a moving picture house to a $50 job on the stage, I gave her a column."

Latent memory stirred to life.

"What'd you say?" I asked.

He repeated his information.

"She would have made good, too," he went on, "if the lights hadn't dazzled her. But it's the same old story — I get tired hearing it. Broadway got her and she's no better now than the

worst. I'm not surprised they put her out; I'm more surprised she had the nerve to come in. Made bold by drink, I suppose," he concluded.

Gradually, there came before my eyes a half-forgotten scene. I saw a stuffy, close, crowded moving picture house in a little city in Ohio. A flashing spotlight threw its glare on the face of a young girl who stepped forward to sing. The audience heard her and applauded and I saw a man standing in the rear suddenly become alert and attentive as he also heard the girl's voice. It was enough.

"Waiter," I called, "the check."

And I went out into the night.

I sometimes wonder how much personal responsibility attaches to the influence we bring to bear on the lives of others. And what is it, after all, which, for good or for ill, warps us from old courses to follow new? Why, for instance, when I awoke one morning years ago to discover to myself that I wanted more room and broader opportunity did Bingo, at that very moment, a thousand miles away, stand in need of a publicity agent? What force created his necessity and my desire and made them fit each other? What delayed my train on the spring evening in the Ohio city and then placed me aboard a street car to bring me, willy nilly, within the range of the voice of Alice Carey?

I have reached the age, I suppose, when most men have arrived at some fairly well defined idea of these controlling forces. But I find that I am strangely without a philosophy of life. I have not thought about it. In ten years I have done the work of twenty and I have had little time, even if I had been possessed of the inclination, to reflect on a matter so abstract. But I think that the subconscious part of my mind has all along been considering the problem and is prepared to lay before me the evidence it has gathered. What it all points to I cannot say, but, from the array of half-forgotten incidents and experiences brought forward now by the busy agency that has served me without my knowledge, I can come quickly to one conclusion at least. We may call it what we will, ignore it, evade it or rebel against it, fear it or worship it, there is some power beyond us and above us that directs us more surely than we realize. As bits of broken glass whirl in a kaleidoscope to combine into new designs, so incidents and circumstances — and accidents—shift and join to shape life's pattern. But — what force turns the wheel?

CHAPTER VIII

WITH THE PRODUCER

In the public mind there is a good deal of mystery associated with the production of plays. But the mystery begins there and ends there. There is none in the business itself. I have just come from the witness stand where I gave what the lawyers call "expert" testimony in a suit brought by a young man to recover some money lost in a theatrical venture. If the young man in the case had not shared the public's credulity, the probabilities are that he would still have his money, or at least a good part of it.

His main trouble was a readiness to accept without question all he heard and all he read about the cost of producing plays. He believed that when a manager advertised a production's cost as $100,000, it was $100,000 it cost! The fact that it really cost considerably less than half that sum never occurred to him. He was ready to invest on the basis of what he believed the cost to be. So, when he put up $10,000 for a half-interest in a production, a half interest was all he got, but his capital paid for the whole of the production and

in addition put some money in his partner's pocket. Naturally, when this began to dawn on him, he wanted an accounting. He will probably get his accounting; the Court will allow him that, and, possibly, a judgment against the partner — the Court may even allow him that. However, he can rest assured he will not get back any of his money. But he has had what Hattie Williams used to sing about —"Experience."

Speaking of hundred thousand dollar productions leads me to remark that there never has been a hundred thousand dollar production. The most expensive production I know of cost $60,000; and it cost that much because the producer who put it on had no storehouse filled with old scenery to draw from. Klaw and Erlanger, William A. Brady or Lee Shubert, to mention only three, could have staged the play, and staged it as completely, for half that sum. All of these producers are well stocked with old sets and properties and they know how to use them. Not long ago, I saw the same interior set in three new Broadway productions, and the three of them, moreover, appeared in rapid succession. Of course, the first two were failures, each playing only a fortnight or less, so it was altogether practicable, though first nighters found it a little monotonous, to use the same set in all three. Nor was it new even to begin with; it had seen service

the season before. There is something like a million dollars' worth of this old scenery in the storehouses of New York — unknown to the novice but available to the man who knows the business.

Cost, it might be said, is invariably exaggerated. I have seen some of our own productions advertised as costing $50,000 when the entire outlay, with every bill audited and paid — every one of them passing through my own hands — would not have totaled $15,000. But exaggeration of one sort or another is a peculiarity of the theatrical business. From producer to usher, from star to super, everybody speaks in hyperbole. It is a childish sort of thing to do, but the only person deceived by it is the person outside of the profession or the beginner who has just entered it. Unfortunately, though, it is the cause of a lot of unnecessary disappointment and unhappiness.

Peggy Hall, for example, is just emerging from that credulous period when she, like all the rest before her, evinced an ingenuous readiness to believe everything she heard. It is the period in the beginner's career when the theater is still what it is to the public in general — a place of fascinating mystery. But stern reality is already invading Peggy's land of dreams and the illusions are retreating. She is beginning to perceive that what seemed from afar so enchanting bears, on

closer inspection, a far different aspect. It is like the cosmetic beauty of the actress — the closer it is observed the less attractive it appears. It is only genius that never loses the enthusiasm of its illusions or counts the way too rough or dark so long as it leads onward toward the goal of its aspiration.

There is excitement in this life behind the scenes and Peggy has had the fever of it and, I might say, the delirium of the fever. But, while the business side of the theater is not without a stimulation of the same sort, this department cannot indulge itself in the excitement that the players experience and even cultivate. It must try to remain calm, preserve its mental equilibrium and sharpen its wits rather than its emotions. It must be all the more coldly calculating and shrewdly judicial, too, for the very reason that at the other end of theatrical affairs, there is this feverish delirium.

And for the most part calculating and judicial it is. It is commercial. Producers produce plays because they think the plays will make money. Plays are not produced merely because they are artistic or because they may serve some reform purpose. Statements to such effect are pure buncombe. They are press agents' fiction. Plays are produced because they promise profits to the producer and for no other reason in the world.

And if by chance they are ever anything more than profitable, they are so incidentally, if not accidentally. Getting money out of them is the manager's business; getting art into them must take care of itself. When a manager gets his hands on a play that he thinks will interest the public sufficiently to draw the public's patronage — and dollars — his first procedure, of course, is to sign a contract with the playwright. If the playwright happens to be a new writer without the prestige of name or success, he will be doing well if the producer agrees to pay him a royalty of five per cent. of the weekly gross receipts up to $5000, seven and one-half per cent. up to $10,000 and ten per cent. of all over that. These terms are eminently fair to both parties. But the playwright will make no mistake if he insists that everything promised verbally is set down in black and white in his contract. He should take nothing for granted and nothing on faith. Later on, if the play is a success, he should permit no departure even in the slightest detail from the spirit and the letter of his contract. He will regret it if he does.

For the man of limited capital the business world in general affords a thousand good opportunities to one that may be found in the theatrical field. There the chances are all against him. It is astonishing, though, how many there are who

will risk everything they have to get into the business. Even women are no exceptions. I heard a young matron only the other day recite the doleful tale of her own experience. She wanted to act; with her the stage-struck period had come later in life than usual. She had escaped it at sixteen only to be attacked at twenty-six, and, like measles delayed beyond childhood, when it "took," it "took" hard.

She knew a young producer who had gained a passing reputation through one successful production — which, by the way, made him very little money — and to him she went, check book in hand. When the negotiations were finished, $10,000 had passed from her account to his and she had for her money a contract in which the manager agreed to produce a certain play within a year, place her in the leading rôle and give her a fifth interest in the production. This signed and sealed, promptly the young man exchanged the woman's gold for letters of credit and set off to Europe in romantic pursuit of an actress who had captured his susceptible heart. He returned minus the money and minus the lady, but not especially worried over the outlook for he had the comforting reassurance that the play had only one set for all its three acts and could be rehearsed and staged entire for a cost not to exceed $2,000. So, for a chance to act and a fifth inter-

est in an unproduced play — an interest worth $500 at the most — the woman had paid $10,000.

The play, it ought to be remarked, is still unproduced and the same manager, I happen to know, is under contract with another person, a young man this time, to produce the same play within another year. When the first partner, acting on a suggestion that followed her tearful recital to me, demanded the return of her money, the second partner was annexed, together with $5,000 he possessed, and this sum was turned over to the first partner with a note for the balance. Peter has been robbed to pay Paul but who will be robbed to pay Peter remains to be seen.

One might enumerate half a hundred producing managers, big and little, but if the number really reaches this total, I will wager that forty of them are doing business on borrowed capital. Some of the biggest, as a matter of fact, put precious little of their own money in their productions. They get their capital from "silent" partners. And profits that may accrue do not go back into the producing business, either; they may go into the purchase or building of theaters now and then, but for the most part, they go into investments of an entirely different kind. Klaw and Erlanger are rich men but the bulk of their money is in investments outside of the theater. They know the hazard of the business, and, fortunately

for themselves, they are in a position to let others take the risks. The two Shuberts pursue the same course. A. H. Wood's fortune is so distributed that only a small portion is represented by his theatrical enterprises. William Harris, Henry Savage, Winthrop Ames, John Cort and two or three more all depend for their substantial incomes on investments that are far more reliable than play producing.

I could name half a dozen millionaires who, for one reason or another, are silent partners of various producing managers. Why they go in for this sort of thing is not as perplexing as it might seem to be. Some of them want a finger in the pie not especially because of any possible profits but merely to gratify a desire to be associated with the stage. For two dollars they can buy a seat in the front of the house but to gain entrance through the stage door sometimes costs a fortune.

A few of them, too, and not always the youngest, either, are promoting the ambitions of various captivating young actresses whose blandishments excel their talents and whose return for the money spent on them and for them is certainly never made in kind. Most persons high up in the business, and many others not so high up, know who is putting up for whom, and why. And practically everybody in the profession knows

that the profession is full of this sort of thing — knows it and discusses it and gossips about it and accepts it as a matter of course, something to be expected and quite natural.

CHAPTER IX

THE MEN IN POWER

THEATRICAL producing in the last eight or ten years has come to be more than ever the business for the man with large capital. To produce in wholesale is the only safe way to produce.

"If I get three successes out of ten productions," Lee Shubert said to me one day, "I am satisfied." That season Shubert got no more than two successes out of ten productions and the two came, one after six successive failures and the other as the ninth production of the series. The man with limited means would have been bankrupt before he could have staged the play that was the first of that group of ten to prove profitable. He might argue, of course, as I heard a young producer argue the other day, that he would be able to select more wisely. But the fact remains that, after all, few do.

As for the man who wants to "break into the game" as an independent producer, he will find it about as difficult as breaking into a modern bank vault. The theatrical affairs of the country

rest in the hands of four men — Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger and Lee and J. J. Shubert. These men, through ownership, leases or booking contracts of one kind and another, control the first class theaters of the country. To the long and bitter fight between the "syndicate"— Klaw and Erlanger and their allies — on the one hand, and the "independents," as they were pleased to call themselves — the Shubert Brothers and their allies — on the other, I need hardly refer. I went through that fight and I wear its scars, figuratively speaking, today. It is ancient history now, however, for a truce exists at present and bids fair, as the combatants learn to trust each other more and to forget the old bitterness, to develop into a permanent peace that will entirely eliminate such cut-throat competition as may still remain.

I have heard some producers express unqualified approval of the present arrangement and its future promise. But I disagree with them. I am "on the inside"; I see the trend of things. And I am absolutely certain that if the Shuberts and the syndicate get any closer together than they are today there will be many a producer, manager, playwright and actor clamoring for a return of old conditions. Nothing worse, in my opinion, could befall the theater.

The only thing that stands now in the way of

a tightening of the grip is the Shubert fear of syndicate retaliation and the syndicate dread of Shubert reprisal. Let them combine, however, in a hard and fast amalgamation of interests, working together without suspicion of each other, and I will wager that everybody connected with the profession or the business, except the trust itself, will be only too willing to exchange peace for war.

There is little, even as things are now, to encourage the young producer. It is all very well to produce, but what about the theaters in which to show what is produced? The Shuberts and the syndicate control the playhouses. Every first class play that tours the country must be booked through one agency or the other. If it happens that neither agency sees any merit in the production submitted for booking, it will not be booked. It will die for the lack of a roof to shelter it. Such a fate may be deserved; on the other hand, it is barely possible that it may not be.

The trouble lies in the fact that Klaw and Erlanger and the Shuberts take no pains to find out. They act as judge, jury and executioner and not in person, either, but usually by proxy, and not by very intelligent proxy at that. Perhaps some inner voice of discretion warns them to avoid the personal appraisement and so escape any subsequent embarrassment. And in thus providing themselves with an alibi they disclose again

that native, Hebraic shrewdness which has characterized all their business procedure and which is at once the despair and envy of those who have suffered by it or profited from it. They know, in other words,— from experience, no doubt — that ignorance betrays itself utterly only through display. So they remain discreetly in the background and send forward a substitute on whose unfortunate head, if necessity arises, blame can later fall.

I have known these men for ten years, I have worked with them and against them, my association with them has enabled me to form a fairly accurate estimate of their tastes and of the scope and reliability of their judgment, and I do not hesitate to say that only one of the four has ever exhibited to me any indication of possessing in the slightest degree any sense of apreciation for real dramatic art. What knowledge they may have, or profess to have or what they may think or feel about any other art, I do not pretend to know. My business with them has been confined to the field of art in which our mutual interests lay and my experience with them there was never of a sort to encourage me to go further. It was sufficient in itself — like a bad oyster. And as for the one I except I have never known his pocketbook to pay tribute to any craving of his artistic soul. He has never sacrificed a nickel to

indulge his taste for art. He has proceeded on the policy that art is all right if it is profitable but that profits, first and last, are the final and only end and aim, art or no art, or, to use his own words often repeated, "art be damned."

Fresh in my memory is an incident that illustrates their method of procedure. A producer, a young man and ambitious, staged a play, with barely enough money to see him through to the first performance. This took place in Philadelphia and when the curtain rose on the opening night, the producer had all his money in the production and his notes out for more. He had followed the usual custom and had asked Klaw and Erlanger to send some one to see his play. The man sent in response to the request was picked up at the last minute. He was utterly incompetent to judge anything. He was both ignorant and coarse. He went, he saw, he condemned. To hear his account of the plot was ludicrous. He had missed the most obvious points, but he certainly had missed nothing at a nearby bar.

The Shuberts sent a woman stenographer. She was of higher grade, to be sure, but she thought it was safer to condemn than to recommend, and condemn she did. The producer was in despair. He had faith in his property; he believed in its ultimate success. But all the faith in the world without a theater to play in would profit him noth-

ing. Some one suggested that a man controlling three New York theaters stood in need of some kind of an attraction to fill at least one of them. He was a syndicate ally, but known to enjoy some personal freedom of action. So the producer borrowed some more money, took the train to New York and finally persuaded the theater manager to accompany him back to Philadelphia. In the end, this man agreed to admit the production to one of his houses. Two days later, every critic in New York acclaimed the play a success, and it remained on Broadway for half a year.

During that period, Klaw and Erlanger tried to buy an interest in the production. The Shuberts repeatedly made the same attempt. The syndicate wanted to book it on the road and so did the Shuberts. There was not, at that time, an agreement of any kind between the two offices and the producer could have got concessions worth while. But the protocol was signed while the negotiations were pending and thereafter, the producer found himself obliged to take what he was offered — that or nothing.

Nor was that all. He was pressed here and pressed there, in a manner that completely baffled him, and the pressure never ceased until he sold out his interest to one of the quartette — which one I shall not say — for a sum that was far below its value. Having nothing more at the time

that anyone else could possibly covet, he was then left in peace. From these plain facts, anyone is at liberty to draw his own conclusions. It only remains to be said that this is no isolated, exceptional case used to point an argument. It is, on the contrary, a thoroughly typical instance. Only the big producers — and not all of them, either — escape experiences of this sort.

In the old days, before the Shuberts strung out a chain of theaters in opposition to the syndicate houses, managers protested bitterly against various alleged abuses. The Shubert competition, however, tended to relieve conditions. But, as the Shuberts gradually grew stronger until finally they were as strong as the syndicate, complaints were again heard. Then managers began shifting their bookings from the syndicate office to the Shubert office and from the Shubert office to the syndicate office and back again. Competition, taking this form, once more afforded relief. Now the two syndicates are working together to a considerable extent and to their own interests, to be sure, but not especially after all, to the interest of anybody else. And there is good reason to believe that they will get still closer together. In that case, competition will be the first thing eliminated. After that, a good many other things will be eliminated — among them, some producers. For three or four, I can already read the handwriting

on the wall. Perhaps they see something in the prospect to rejoice over but if I were in their shoes, I should feel more anxious than pleased.

To my mind, the long and short of the whole matter is this: If a man wants to go into the business let him go into it alone. If he has not $10,000 to lose he would better stay out of it altogether and save his money. At best the odds are all against him. But when he acts as "angel," even to a limited extent, turns his money over to some one else and relies on another person's judgment, business sense, honesty, integrity and economy, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he will lose. If he is a millionaire and can afford to lose, well and good. If his capital is small, he will get more out of it down town in Wall Street than he will up town in Times Square.

CHAPTER X

THE ADVENTURE TYPICAL

It has been my custom for the last half a dozen years or so to drop in at night at a certain Broadway café. There, about midnight, I have a bite to eat before I go on to my home. It is a gay place, frequented by gay people — actors, actresses, men-about-town and the omnipresent chorus girl whenever fortune favors her and she falls in with an escort who is rash enough to ask her where she prefers to dine. I like it because it is gay — because it is even excessively, garishly gay; I go there on that account. There is blessed relaxation in being a part, albeit only a passive, silent part, of the gayety. It takes my mind off the affairs of the day.

Here as usual I came one Saturday night, and took my accustomed place in a corner, gave my order and then, in a leisurely way, proceeded to take casual census of the guests. My eye had not travelled far, however, when it came to a sudden stop at sight of Peggy Hall. Should I have been surprised? Perhaps — still I was not. The real

surprise in some things that we think ought to be surprising is the fact that they are not surprising at all. As soon as my gaze rested on Peggy, I was aware only that I had even foreseen it, anticipated it and that now, when I beheld it actually before me, there was nothing surprising about it. Why should it have been? I knew the life behind the curtain; I knew the atmosphere there; I knew what they produced; I knew the results. And I had known all along that Peggy was bound sooner or later to encounter just such an experience as was confronting her at that very moment — that she, in common with other girls in her situation, must come at last to the inevitable ordeal of this acid test.

She was one of a group of half a dozen, three men and, herself included, three girls. Like Peggy, her companions were from the chorus at the Circle; the men were young and of the familiar Broadway type. They were near at hand, Peggy's back toward me, and, with only a little effort, I could follow fairly well the drift of their talk. In front of them were cocktail glasses, Peggy's half empty, and on this their conversation turned.

"Come on, drink up. Be a reg'lar fellow," one young man kept saying in monotonous reiteration.

It was plain that he and his two companions had

been drinking before the group had assembled at the café.

"Go on, Peg," urged a girl, "we're all waitin' for you."

Peggy sipped sparingly. The other girl whispered something to the man nearest her. He shook his head, incredulous. But the girl whispered again.

"That so?" he asked, still doubting.

The girl nodded.

"Can't you see?" she demanded.

He shot an appraising glance at Peggy and then leaned toward her across the table.

"Go ahead, Peggy," he said. "It's always the first swallow or two that you feel. We all feel it then. But it disappears when you've drunk it all."

She smiled and shook her head.

"No," she protested, "I don't want any more. Thank you just the same."

"Aw, come on, be a reg'lar fellow," the first man repeated.

"The rest of you order — won't you? Don't mind me; just let me finish this."

"She don't like it," interrupted the third man. "She'd rather have something else. Here, Peg, let me order you some wine. Give me that card."

He took the wine list and handed it to Peggy.

"Hurry up, little girl. The gas wagon's

waitin'. Pick out what you want and we'll have another roun' and then spin out the Drive and back."

So it went — five against one. But Peggy, somehow, seemed to realize her situation. Her intuition warned her.

The whispers of the girl were not necessary to inform a close observer that Peggy was new to such things. That was obvious. And that explains the part that liquor plays on such occasions — it is not offered simply as a convivial cup and nothing more. It is given for the information it will impart. Any experienced man-about-town can learn more about a woman after she has had two or three drinks in his company than he could learn in a week without their assistance. They line the track of the hours immediately ahead with infallible signals and these, in turn, tell him plainly what to expect and how to proceed. They flash their lights, red, green or white, and he reads them and heeds them and acts accordingly.

It was evident that Peggy instinctively felt the danger in the cocktail. The others knew she felt it, too, and they wanted the drink inside where it would fight her and not outside where it would fight them. It was their ally only when it was drunk. But Peggy fenced gracefully and successfully. Still, I could fancy she was wondering how the contest would end and was feeling, brave

though her appearance, the need for help. I watched unobserved — the old, old game, Broadway seeking its prey, stalking its quarry, running it down. I watched until I thought I could tell, from the tired droop of Peggy's shoulders, that she was about at the end of her resources, and then I made up my mind to interfere. But no way suggested itself until one of the men provided me with a plan by going to the telephone booth. I slipped out and followed him. At the door of the booth I accosted him. I said to him in substance that I wanted to avoid any embarrassing scene, but that one of the young women in his party would have to be excused. He was immediately and completely and bristlingly belligerent. I am not a small man, however, and there is nothing frail looking about my physique; so he thought better of it and changed his attitude. Besides, I ached to hit him, I fairly shook with the desire to seize him, shake him, wipe up the floor with him and then kick him out. Probably I showed it, too. At any rate, he became very tractable and agreed to see Peggy to a taxi and to send her home.

I watched him return to the table and whisper to Peggy and I saw her rise, say good-by and follow him to the door. He did what he agreed to do and Dick Hall's daughter went home alone in the motor car. I smiled when I saw the expression of amazement on the faces of his companions

when he returned to the table without her. What he told them I do not know and I do not care.

Three days later, Peggy was in my office.

"I am going home," she said.

And that was all. I did not press her for any explanation nor did I, on my part, volunteer any information. If Peggy reads this she will learn for the first time how her temporary guardian, remiss as he was most of the time, came to her rescue on one occasion at least.

"Peggy," said I in answer, "I am going home too. Stay on until it's time for me to leave and we'll all go back together."

There is no accounting for the whims of young women. Peggy Hall stepped around my desk and kissed me.

CHAPTER XI

A BACKWARD GLANCE

CHANGES come rapidly in the theater. For the most part, they are improvements, too. To be sure, the more recent years have developed no transcendent geniuses among either playwrights or players, but they have added some names to the theatrical roll of honor that will gain in importance, I think, as time provides a better perspective for our judgment of them. They have done more for the stage than we can realize until a new decade comes to apprise us with its inevitable reflection of their influence. Then again, taking everything into consideration, the general average of plays and playing is better; the general standard is higher. More ability is required today to gain substantial success as playwright or player than was required fifteen or twenty years ago. This is due undoubtedly to a more exacting public taste and a more discriminating public judgment, which is to say that the spectator also has progressed. He is not so easily satisfied.

I see these things not as critic, nor as playwright, player or spectator; they come to me in my

capacity as manager. They come directly, day by day, as returns in the form of box office statements. I get them not as opinions but as figures. This may seem to be a surprising confession to come from a manager and if it seems a little confusing also it might be remembered that while our stage is commercialized to the last degree, it does not follow that it is wisely commercialized. It makes money for those who control it but if those in control were more competent to understand the signs and interpret the facts and proceed accordingly, it might increase the profits considerably. Indeed the real reactionary influence of the last ten years, the check to progress, the handicap, has been not so much the mere commercialization of the stage as the manner of the commercialization and the character and ambition of the men who devised the manner.

However, bad as the system is, some good has come out of it. It did much, for instance, to develop our native drama. Those in control, of course, had no definite intention of encouraging the native drama. What they did in this respect they did by accident. They had tried to outdo each other in the matter of playhouse control and they came abruptly one day to the realization that they had many playhouses and few plays and that London and Paris and Vienna could not supply the demand. So the native dramatist began to get his

hearing. They tried him as a desperate remedy for a desperate situation. And since then he has gained a position of his own. He has established his drama and it stands today distinguished and recognized for qualities entirely peculiar to itself and unmistakably characteristic of its nationality. Whether, as a whole, it is the equal of the contemporaneous British drama, I will not presume to say. I only pronounce it different — a distinct school. It has developed its own style and its own details of technique and these in turn have brought about changes in the style and the technique of acting.

So much for this aspect of it. In the ten years that I have been in the business I have seen an amazing improvement in the mechanics of the stage. For that matter, in the last decade even the architecture of our playhouses has been changed. We incline today toward the smaller and more "intimate" theater, with the gallery abolished and a pronounced disposition to abolish the balcony also. Of course, the gallery really abolished itself; it left us. It went away to the movies, and the balcony now is showing signs of similar desertion. So it, too, may pass.

These same ten years have also witnessed the wonderful development of the movies. They have seen them come and conquer, the greatest, swiftest, most astonishing conquest in the whole

history of the world's amusements. And if anyone imagines that the movies have not brought changes to the legitimate theater and to the technique of player's and playwright's art he is no interpreter of the signs to be seen on every hand.

I used to hear it said — and I said myself — that the movies would not draw patronage from the theater but, on the contrary, would add to its patronage. I still hear the same thing said but long ago I abandoned the theory. Facts disprove it. The patronage that the movies have made has been for the movies. It begins there and ends there. The legitimate theater has not benefited; it has suffered instead. And I think it will suffer still more in the future. It only remains for some enterprising manager to stretch a chain of movie theaters across the country, book them as the syndicate or the Shuberts book their houses, establish a reputation for showing in them only the best pictures produced throughout the world, keep the standard high and the prices low and the small legitimate theater, minus gallery and minus balcony, too, will be as ample in seating capacity as it is now intimate in atmosphere. I shall not be surprised when such a system of movie theaters is organized. It is bound to come. I am surprised now that it has been delayed as long as it has.

In the ten years there have been improvements

in scenery. American scene painters here and there are beginning to be artists. Some even are bold enough to exhibit signs of incipient rebellion against precedent and, while it is, perhaps, a good deal to hope for, it is barely possible that they may yet emancipate themselves from their slavery to models and methods of the past and in its place establish independence and originality. Something to the same effect is to be said of the few men who profess to be experts on stage lighting. They are too easily satisfied. Still, progress in this important department of the theater has been marked and there is promise of more improvement to come.

So, in brief, a few of the changes. They are more substantial than enumeration makes them appear. If anyone doubts this let him attend a revival of some old play popular a dozen years ago. William A. Brady has a singular fondness for occasionally supplying a curiosity of the sort — by preference something that he once acted in himself. One of them that I recall was "Rosedale," the most popular play of its day. But its day was fifty years ago. Lester Wallick produced it and played it in the early 60's. Brady played in it years later when it was still a reliable standby in stock. His associations with "Rosedale" were probably pleasant ones and recollections of these no doubt influenced his judgment.

He thought Broadway would be as pleased as he to see the old play once more played. But it was not. Brady came very near enjoying a monopoly of the pleasure supplied by "Rosedale" without anybody's showing the slightest disposition to dispute it with him. He had it to himself.

Very quickly he wrapped it up and sent it to the storehouse. And when I think of this Brady venture I am reminded of the ubiquitous old gentleman who is always gravely shaking his head and sighing for "those good old comedies" of yesterday. Compared with the comedies of to-day they were probably very bad old comedies but there is no convincing him of this. He is a very obstinate old gentleman who, like as not, thinks that if he could only sit down to the sort of meal that was served to him in his youth he would eat with the relish of youth. But that is only an illusion; he sighs for a cook when he ought to be sighing for an appetite. And when he grieves for the old comedies what he really craves is his old capacity for enjoyment, the zest of ready laughter and the freshness of youth.

As the seasons come and go, there are changes, too, in the ranks of the players. Some go forward and some go backward — only a few stand still. Protest against the practice as the actors may — and do — managers still fill rôles and will continue to fill them by selecting players of a

" type " corresponding to the " type " of the part to be played. This increases the changes among the players; it adds to the inevitable changes that time and circumstances are bound to make. Actors, of course, think that managers ought to choose talent instead of type, but the actors are wrong and the managers are right. Audiences today demand verisimilitude; they do not want a tall man in a short man's part nor a fat man cast in a lean man's rôle. No more do they want feminine forty playing ingénue twenty. Nor will they have it.

But managers are in error when they assume that an actor who makes a success in a certain rôle of a certain type can play no other rôle. And the actor's protest against this phase of the subject is well founded. However, managerial risks are numerous enough at best and if managers decline to experiment they are not without excuse. It is hard, though, on the actor who needs employment but finds no market for his talent because he has established a reputation for one particular line of parts and that " type " is not at the moment in demand.

It is especially hard on the ingénue. I have seen many of them come and many of them go, Time's relentless hand ringing down the curtain for all of them as girlishness passes and the bloom fades. It is a sad time for any woman when she

suddenly realizes that youth has departed, but for the actress of the ingénue rôles it is both sad and tragic. It means as often as not the end of her career. She could play other rôles, no doubt, and play them well, but the managers know her only as an ingénue. She has a reputation as an ingénue; as an ingénue the public accepted her and applauded her and pronounced her a success. The manager is afraid to tamper with what Fate has decreed and the public has endorsed. So the curtain descends, sometimes, it is true, to rise again on a new career newly begun with the ingénue in maturer parts as prominent as those abandoned. But that is the exception and not the rule.

Managers, also, come and go. With many the stay is short; some linger hopefully though painfully through a season or two and some pass despairingly though mercifully in a single night. They are managers at eight P. M. and bankrupts at eleven. Some, on the other hand, weather the vicissitudes and rise to positions of importance. Yet of all those who were leaders in the business ten years ago, whose fame was national or even international, only a few continue in the same prominence today. Among them, of course, and the most conspicuous are David Belasco, George C. Tyler, William A. Brady, Henry W. Savage, the Shuberts and Klaw and Erlanger.

Of these, Belasco is the master. Time, I think, will write his name large in the history of the American theater for, ridicule him as we may for what we consider his posing and posturing, no producer in America, past or present, has done more for the art of the playhouse than he and none so far has contributed more than he to its future development. He has been to the technique of production what Ibsen was to the technique of drama. And if I were asked to sum up his achievement briefly, I should say that it rests in his discovering to producer, player and playgoer the tremendous value of detail. By giving proper emphasis — no more and no less — to a single detail, I have known Belasco to build up a scene in rehearsal where others saw nothing at all and I have known that scene to make a success of the production.

Tyler, whose individual personality was long concealed in the firm name of Liebler and Company, is second only to Belasco as master of detail. And Tyler, I believe, is Belasco's logical successor. Comparatively young, from the Middle West and still of it, he is a man of high ideals and big ideas. With these he combines good sense, originality, ability and daring; he believes in producing plays worth while and plays of real merit. That he has encountered a good many financial difficulties is not in my opinion a reflection upon Tyler but upon the

theater-going public. I remember meeting him one afternoon and hearing from his lips some surprisingly high praise for a play he had just read.

"It's bound to make a fortune," he said.

"When do you put it on?" I asked.

"I'm not putting it on," he replied. "It's a big melodrama and I'm getting away from melodrama. I've put my standard up a notch and I mean to keep it there."

And keep it there he did. His opinion of the manuscript he had read was more than justified for there has not been in a quarter of a century a greater success financially. "Within the Law," for that was the melodrama, has made I suppose, a million dollars.

To show how even the most astute of the producers occasionally go far astray in judgment, Brady produced "Within the Law" and, after a few weeks of indifferent business, lost his confidence in it and sold it outright to Selwyn; and Selwyn — who is himself one of the newcomers in the field and a producer of exceptional promise — reaped the golden harvest that Tyler had predicted, that Brady doubted and that Selwyn, with clearer vision in his turn, foresaw. But Brady, if he missed it in this instance, does not miss it often. Melodrama has made a fortune for Brady. Yet I believe he will go down in the theatrical annals as

the producer of his day who did more than any of the others to keep old-fashioned sentiment on the stage. Brady, personally, has a deep regard for this homely sentiment and he has, too, a genuine reverence for the theater as an institution. He would probably deny this, gruffly and immediately, but there is a good deal of pose about Brady's gruffness. He likes to be known as a kind of rough diamond, but my acquaintance with him has been long enough and intimate enough to convince me that most of the roughness is assumed. It is nine-tenths bluff and extends no deeper than the surface. No matinee girl ever had a tenderer heart.

Charles Frohman, I believe, will be written down simply as the great importer. No manager has translated to the American stage more foreign productions than did he before his tragic and untimely death and none has done less for the American drama than did he. As a producer, he was more a trader than a creator, though, in recent years, largely because available foreign products have been scarce and competition for them keen, he occasionally produced a play of domestic origin. That was not his policy, however. Savage has done his share of importing, too, but he will be known in years to come not for this so much as for genuine good he has done for the musical productions of his day.

As for the Shuberts, they are wholesale pur-

veyors of entertainment — nothing more and nothing less. They produce whatever promises to be profitable — from vaudeville to Shakespeare. They have proceeded on the principle that if they can have quality with quantity, very good but quantity they must have in any event.

Klaw and Erlanger are the theatrical organizers. They were the first to nationalize the playhouse business and to them belongs the credit of evolving system out of chaos — and the consequences. As producers they count for little, but their service to the box-office has been inestimable — to the art of the theater it has been insignificant.

Among the producers of today whose advent in the field is of later date, George M. Cohan is preeminently the leader. Winthrop Ames is another of proved ability, but Ames, it strikes me, has already shown us not only what he can do but the best he can do, while Cohan, with remarkable achievements both as playwright and as producer already to his credit, seems to be only beginning to show what he can do. Incidentally, I know of no men in the business who show greater contrast than these two. Their differences appear, of course, in their works. Ames' productions have a finished but feminine quality; Cohan's are like the adolescent youth, virile, strong, with a strength not yet under full control and crude on that account but

still powerful and rich in promise. Ames is the aristocrat; Cohan is the democrat.

But all this is merely opinion — only my personal estimate of these men. It counts for nothing more. Nor have I mentioned all the prominent producers, either — I do not know enough about some of them to justify forming an opinion. But this I do know about all of them — they begin to fail as producers as they leave their youth behind them. To grow old means disaster for them no less than for the player. And this is only logical after all, for the playhouse is more for the young than for the old — the average age of the playgoer is under twenty — and it demands of those who write for it, produce for it and act for it that they have the eyes and the hearts and the visions and the feelings of youth.

Returning to fact, the last ten years have recorded still another change in the theatrical situation that is both significant and important. I have spoken briefly of the change in the public's taste and judgment. Its attitude has changed as well and now it is interesting itself in a serious study of the art of the theater. Today many colleges and some high schools include a study of the drama in their curriculums. Clubs for the same purpose have been formed and, as further evidence of the scope of the movement, we have the Drama League.

Good has been accomplished by the Drama League and no doubt much more good will come of it in the future. But if it entertains the notion that it wields any influence through the box-office, it is deceived. Whether it could do so now and fails because it is not efficiently managed or whether it may later on as its membership increases and it learns better how to apply its influence I cannot say. I only know that, from the box-office point of view, managers neither respect it nor fear it. They laugh at it.

There is reason for this, too. Personally, I have known it to bulletin productions of ours with unqualified approval and praise without the slightest encouraging effect on the box-office receipts. In Chicago, on one occasion, we produced a play that gained a bulletin endorsement of the most enthusiastic sort. Before the League issued it, we were playing to $200 and $250 a performance — not enough to pay the salaries of the company. After the League issued it we kept on playing to $200 and $250 a performance. And we sent the production to the storehouse. On another occasion, in a city famed for its culture, we employed unusual measures to interest the members of the local Drama League. We had a production of which we were genuinely proud — from the pen of an author of international repute, played by an excellent company and produced with scenery that

reflected for the first time on the American stage the method and style of the German impressionistic school. Besides acquainting League members with these facts by special letters addressed to them personally, the author was induced to lecture and the members were invited to hear him.

They came — fifteen hundred of them. And, passing out, the fifteen hundred bought exactly $11.00 worth of tickets. We spent over $300.00 on the League and the $11.00 represented about all of the returns on the investment. Of course, it may have been a bad lecture. I did not hear it but I know the author better now and I am perfectly willing to admit it was a bad lecture. But, even so, the results were disappointing. The League bulletin praised the play, players and production and even producers — praised them highly — but the League members paid the bulletin no heed. We played two weeks to a weekly loss of $2500, went next to a city not famed for its culture and where no Drama League has yet appeared to guide the benighted public and played several weeks to good business and enthusiastic audiences.

But, commendable as these two plays were, they were not popular. The Drama League did not endorse them unwisely; it merely endorsed them to no avail. Nor are these two cases exceptions; I could name a score like them. But all lead to the

same conclusion and this in turn squares with the history of the theater all the way from Bankside to Broadway — there is no popularizing an unpopular play. It may be "artistic," it may be "ethical," it may "deserve success" and so on throughout the whole list of the conventional remarks applying to such cases, but if the public does not like it the public will not go to see it. It wastes its sweetness on the desert air. On the other hand, a popular play, one that has caught the public's fancy, devoid of every vestige of art and ethics though it may be, may go unbulletined or it may even be condemned and the box-office will never be aware that it has been either ignored completely or damned utterly.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST ACT

INTELLIGENT criticism in the columns of the daily press and in the pages of the nation's periodicals is, in the final analysis, the drama's truest friend and the public's most reliable guide. One fair criticism, recording the judgment of an experienced critic, is worth a whole season's output of bulletins. It carries more weight, reaches more people, speaks with greater authority and is usually of more immediate and permanent value both to the playhouse and to the public.

I have known a good many critics in my time — not personally, but by their works. Some of these have been able men, wise men, performing a good service and performing it well. Some have been fools. I know a good many critics today, and I divide them now as in the past — the wise on one hand, the fools on the other. For the critic who knows his business, who knows what he is writing about, who has authority because he has knowledge and experience as well as taste and judgment, I have the deepest respect. I value his opinion and I envy his influence. Few positions

in the whole field of journalism are more important or more responsible than his. Critics of music, pictures and literature can never do as much for their readers nor do it as quickly as the critic of the drama. And that is why his position is important and his responsibility great.

There is one criticism of critics, however that I want to make and in making it I voice the opinion of the playwright and the player as well as that of the producer. Too few of them know the stage. They do not know its mechanical possibilities or its mechanical limitations. Yet it is their duty to know both and, if they did know both, stage effects, lighting and scenery on the American stage would be improved — a higher standard would be set. They would know acting better, too, and nine-tenths of them, as their criticisms show, are in need of vast improvement in this respect. Their practice is to devote half a column or more to a critical résumé of the play and not more than a meager paragraph to the playing. They are adept in judging the playwright's work but they are evidently pitifully incompetent to appraise the player's. Apparently they do not know acting at all — that is, as an art.

To give one more humble opinion. I look upon Louis V. DeFoe, of the New York *World,* and James O'Donnell Bennett, still, I hope, the critic of the Chicago *Tribune,* as the best dramatic

critics in America. Honest, fair, sympathetic, always serving the higher ideals of the theater, these two men, through many seasons, have held firm to the best and the most substantial and permanent while others have been misled by passing fads. Since I know the first only slightly and the latter not at all — I think I have seen him once — I judge them wholly by what they have been writing for the last ten years. Both could be more constructive than they are; neither could be more sincere. And it seats me more firmly than ever on my hobby when I reflect that both are products of the Middle West whence comes — because it is still a "cleaner, greener land" — the most of all that is best in our theater today. I have a high regard for these men, and all such men, and for the work they do and the service they render.

But, for the man who writes about the theater without knowing the theater; for the man who would rather be clever in style than thorough in judgment; for the man who glorifies theories and spurns facts; for the man with no honest opinion of his own, right or wrong, but who cravenly paraphrases the opinion of another; for the man who thinks but is afraid to say what he thinks; for the little man of big conceit who never thinks at all; for the man who would be critic, who poses as critic, who serves as critic, but who does not know and who knows that he does not know and never

will know and never can know, yet who lives and writes the lie of pretending to know — for all these — and they are numerous — I have only contempt. And it is only contempt, too, that I have for the player who says he never reads what the critics say of his acting, but who does nevertheless and only fails to profit from what he reads, for the producer who fawns on them when they praise his successes and denounces them as knaves or fools or both when they condemn his failures, and for the playwright who pretends to believe — only so long as they decline to endorse him — that critics cannot judge plays at all until they have written plays.

But from all of this and further thought of it as part of my daily work, from consideration of it and analysis of it only to the practical end that the conclusions may somehow be transmuted into dollars, I turn finally away. I have given to the theater in the only way it was open to me to serve it, the best I had in me. I have crowded twenty years' work into ten. I am weary and I am done.

I went the other day to a playhouse that was completed and opened ten years ago. I remember its first night — it was also my first night. I recall the play, the players, the audience. Today its seats are empty, its doors are closed. Tomorrow it becomes a picture house. I sent the

man with me to the stage and, for a moment, I sat alone in one of the dusty seats — the very one I occupied on that opening night. I could recall its location and pick it out as though it were only yesterday that I occupied it. All was quiet and I fell into a revery . . .

"Are you there, sir?" called the man from the stage.

"Yes," I replied.

"Shall I give you any light?" he asked.

"No," said I, "drop the curtain and go home." And in the shadows and the silence I thought my words were echoed back to me — drop the curtain and go home.

THE END

A SELECTED LIST

OF

DRAMATIC LITERATURE

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Four Plays of the Free Theater

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